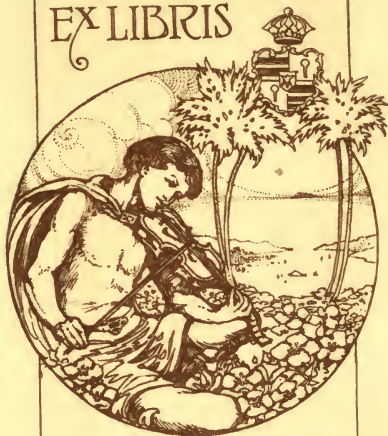


THE SOUL OF A TENOR

HENDERSON



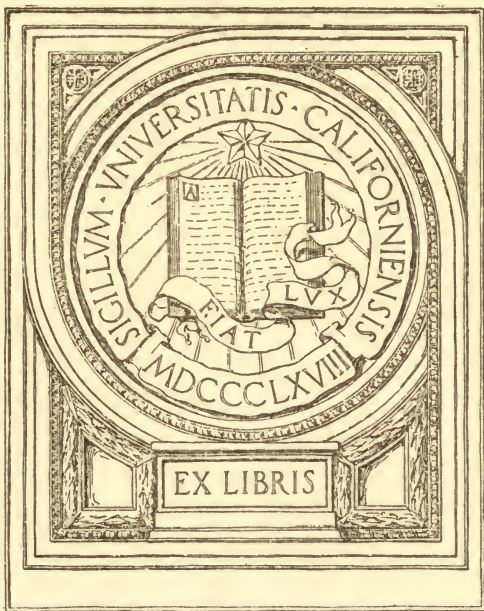
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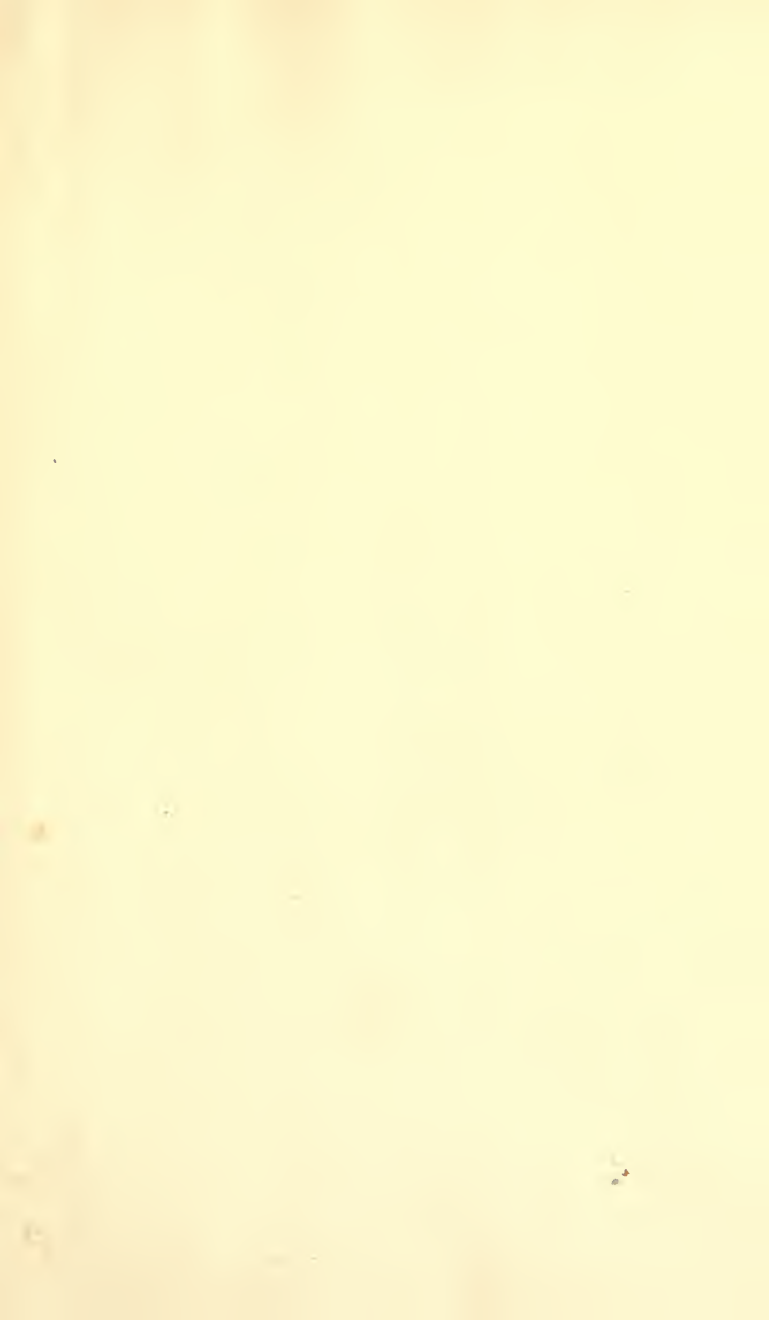
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She took the flower from her mouth and struck him gently across the lips with it, and sang: "È bello e ardito". (Page 73)

THE SOUL OF A TENOR

A ROMANCE

By

W. J. HENDERSON

Author of "The Story of Music," "The Art of the Singer,"
"Some Forerunners of Italian Opera"

Frontispiece in color by
GEORGE GIBBS



NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

1912

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ABORIGINAL

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Published October, 1912

Gift of Sir Henry Heyman

THE QUINN & BODEN CO. PRESS
RAHWAY, N. J.

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PREFATORY NOTE

THERE are no portraits in this story. I have dared to give a momentary glimpse of one supreme interpreter, but none of the other characters in this book ever existed. The need of a "local habitation and a name" led to the choice of the Metropolitan Opera House as the theater of scenes in the drama. Those who are acquainted with the history of the institution will know that no such company as that found in this book ever sang there, and that none of the incidents ever took place. No more did those placed beyond the walls of the opera house. But opera land is an existing country; and a real artist might be born in it in some such way as is hereinafter set forth.

W. J. H.

THE SOUL OF A TENOR

CHAPTER I

MRS. HARLEY MANNERS, just stepping from her car in front of the Waldorf-Astoria, was a vision of radiant expectancy. She was hastening to one of those perfectly delightful Monday morning musicales at which, for an inconsiderable price, you could sit and rub shoulders with people right in the heart of the smart set. Mrs. Harley Manners was not in that set. She knew many people in it, and purred audibly when they spoke to her. When they did not, which was the more usual occurrence, she retained her composure and waited. She knew that all of them would have to speak to her from time to time, for she was a cheerful and insistent laborer on all sorts of committees for charitable entertainments, benefits, and what not. She was always

ready to do most of the work, all of the talking, and to sign a really handsome check.

So when she went to a Monday morning musicale, and the sun of the smart set shone upon her, she was repaid. If at the next one the heavens were covered with gloomy gray clouds, she imperturbably drew her wraps about her and waited for brighter weather. Some people might have called her a climber, but climbers usually attain higher altitudes, especially in the complicated jungle of New York Society. No, Mrs. Harley Manners was not a climber, for she never rose. She was just a sitter. She sat tight and waited for what never came. But her faith and patience were inexhaustible, and she had a perennial object in life. She was trying to live down the appalling fact that her husband was not a banker, a broker, or even a wine merchant, but a hotel provision contractor.

So she stepped from her olive limousine just as if she were one of the elect. She moved briskly toward the entrance. She was early. That was part of her policy. By going early she was more

likely to catch opportunities to corner in conversation women who would have dodged her at the last moment. On this particular Monday morning her plans were frustrated by the unexpected advent of Philip Studley, who, in the most inconsequent and, indeed, inessential manner, chanced to be passing the huge hotel. Studley was a non-descript in the seething life of New York. He was the music critic of a morning newspaper, and enjoyed all the glory and humiliations of such a position. One of the humiliations was having to endure the diplomatic enthusiasms of Mrs. Harley Manners and her breed. For when this distinguished sitter was not abiding in the neighborhood of smart-set persons, she passed her hours in prostration before the throne of some musical celebrity. Next to receiving a smile from a society leader, she valued having a musical personage at luncheon or dinner. Philip Studley was a sort of musical personage. At any rate, musical personages talked about him. Some blessed him and many cursed him.

Some of those singular creatures who regard

it as an object in life to attend performances of operas generally wearisome to their jaded minds chiefly for the sake of gathering in exclusive compartments denominated boxes and making known to all the world the pregnant fact that they belong to a coterie set above the small army of nonentities in the orchestra stalls, some of these self-satisfied fugitives from the brotherhood of mankind were in the habit of giving vent from time to time to their opinions of Studley and his kind. They asserted that plebeians such as he should not be permitted to discuss in newspapers the doings of the entertainers hired to amuse the lords and ladies of creation. Some of the men were more deeply wounded by the critical comments than the women were, but only when the offensive comments affected certain feminine song birds.

And so it chanced at times that the war of words about some newspaper scribbler waxed quite hot, and it was known that on more than one occasion the expulsion of Philip Studley from the theater had been formally demanded at meet-

ings of the board of directors. But wiser heads had always prevailed, for there was much influence in the argument that expulsion would confer too much seeming importance on a very unimportant person. And so Studley's name was from time to time in the mouths of men and women to whom Mrs. Harley Manners adoringly looked up from her seat among the sitters. Furthermore, he served as a target for Mrs. Manners' most pointed comments on "art" and "artists." In their world these words meant music and people who made it or performed it. She could talk with her most eloquent ignorance to Studley, and wet him down from head to foot with her little amateur smatterings, and he had to answer tolerantly because she was a woman. Otherwise he was not especially useful, because he would not mingle freely in the circles of those about whom he had to write, and he was acquainted with only two or three "artists." He could not widen the sphere of Mrs. Harley Manners by introducing her to more celebrities. She knew twenty times as many of them as he did. But it was fated that on this

particular morning he was to present to Mrs. Manners a shocking and delicious piece of information.

"Going to the musicale, I suppose," he said as he bowed to her.

"I rarely miss one," she replied, smiling up into his face with that boyish frankness which was her only charm; "and to-day I am so interested. There are to be examples of early French music sung by that marvelous French tenor, Remy."

"Yes," said Studley thoughtfully; "queer, though, isn't it, that he has to roam around the country doing this sort of thing, instead of singing in opera, either here or in Paris?"

"I assure you," said Mrs. Manners earnestly, "that he is such a true artist that he prefers to do this sort of work, in which he is entirely unhampered by the notions of impresarios or conductors."

"Yes, I rather fancied that had something to do with it. He is an artist. That is undeniable."

He stopped short to smile brightly and bow to a very erect young woman who was passing in a

dark-tinted limousine car. Mrs. Harley Manners stared at her. Studley looked a little amused.

"Don't you know her?" he asked.

"No," replied Mrs. Manners, "I do not. But, really, Mr. Studley, I must be hastening or I shall be late."

"Good-by," he said; "I'm quite sure you will become acquainted with Helen Montgomery. Baroni is paying her ardent attention. I shouldn't wonder if something really serious might come of it. Good-morning."

He walked away, leaving her bereft of speech, or even breath, for that was the very first minute that any one outside of the inner circle of the music world had heard of this thing. Mrs. Manners rushed up to the concert room and made a dozen frantic efforts to entice social persons into conversation before she remembered that she had never seen the name of Helen Montgomery recorded "among those present." Then she wondered if Henry Murtha, the society reporter of a certain great daily, would know. So when she was about to go to her seat, she luckily caught

him, and, pushing him into a corner whence he could not escape, said:

“Who is Helen Montgomery?”

“What Helen Montgomery do you mean?” he answered.

“I don’t know, except that she is the one Baroni is attentive to.”

“Ah, yes; but you can hardly expect me to know anything about that. You might ask one of the musical news reporters.”

But Mrs. Harley Manners drew the line there. She decided that she would wait, because all things come to those who wait, and she would not have to wait more than two hours. She was going right home, and one of her guests at luncheon was a member of the opera company. Then she would find out. How dared any mere woman aspire to the attentions of the great Baroni?

Born plain Leander Barrett, he had lived the more or less eventful life of a Pittsburgher till he reached the age of seventeen. He was then in his Freshman year at a famous university, and had “made the glee club.” Fortunately for him, the

university had a department of music, and its head was one of those uncommon men who know something about the singing voice. He heard Barrett sing once or twice, and then sent for him. He asked him what he expected to do after graduation, and learned that the young man contemplated the study of law. Having ascertained that the parents of this youth were not of such deadening social rank that they might not be brought to consider an artistic career for their son, he sat down and wrote a letter to old Peter Barrett, which brought that excellent man by express to an interview. The long and short of it was that the parents of young Barrett were convinced that their son had an extraordinary tenor voice, and that it might be his fortune.

The head of the music department assured the parents that there was a thoroughly competent teacher in the city where the college was, and thus it came about that young Barrett was permitted to continue his course and graduate before he was sent to Europe to finish his studies. In Europe his master found him thoroughly well grounded in

voice technic, and proceeded to impart the necessary instructions in style and interpretation. In four years the young man, who, curiously enough, refused to go too fast, was ready for his début. He appeared as Elvino in "La Sonnambula" at the Teatro Bellini in Catania, and the astonished Italians rose at him. They had not heard anything like him in many, many years. His voice was the true lyric tenor, but of uncommon power, and he sang with a tone production absolutely perfect, so that his entire scale was perfectly equalized, and his command of a ravishing mezza voce enabled him to whisper sentiment into the soprano's ear in an irresistible manner. In two months he was engaged for Milan, where his Edgardo was a sensation. In less than a year he sang Romeo in Paris. Two seasons later he was engaged for the Metropolitan Opera House, and in one more he reached Covent Garden. Leander Barrett, of Pittsburgh, Pa., had conquered the world.

It was universally conceded that he was in some ways the most gifted tenor since Jean de Reszke. The *Boston Herald* declared that he

was far greater, because one night, when he had a cold, he sang out of tune, and this the Boston man declared showed that he was not a mere vocal machine. The *Evening Post* of New York fell at his feet because, when made up for Lohengrin, he was the image of Max Alvary. That he sang it like Campanini was not mentioned. The *Tribune* published a deprecatory essay two columns long after he sang Don Ottavio in Mozart's inaccessible "Don Giovanni," and a sprightly weekly printed eight pictures of him and his shoes and stockings, with a Sunday page giving an intimate account of his manner of taking his morning bath and dressing for the day. The *American* expressed regrets about him because, being an American, he did not advocate opera in English. The *Sun* went into a profound analysis of his vocal method and his treatment of recitative in all schools of opera, showing thereby that he was a greater master of the lyric art than Farinelli or Garat, singers of whom the readers of the article had never heard, and about whom, therefore, they cared absolutely nothing. The *Times* asserted that he had no

method at all, and that this was what made him a truly great singer.

The truth was that Baroni, as the world called him, had a perfect tenor voice of two octaves and one note. He had a high D flat in his scale, but never used it except occasionally in vocalizing. He valued it because it kept his C in comfort. He had personal magnetism, graceful action, and a blind musical instinct which led him to make effective and even bewitching, if not logical, nuances. It was said of him that he was a highly cultivated gentleman, who had profited greatly by the serious studies of his university course. The fact was that he had passed through the university much as hundreds of other young men do. He had lived the life of a club man, and some of the floating dust of learning which was in the surrounding atmosphere had settled upon his shoulders. He was not well informed, nor had he any intellectual acumen. He was not a musician, nor a true lyric artist; but he had the talent of the theater, and this informed his singing with a routine eloquence which he himself could not rightly have explained.

So Baroni conquered the world, and women threw themselves in his path and begged him to trample upon their souls. But he was a singularly decent chap, and laughed at nearly all of them. He had his little affairs, but they were without exception confined to his profession. On the whole, he lived a remarkably respectable life for an all-conquering tenor.

Mrs. Harley Manners did not hear any of the music at that Monday morning musicale. She was thinking how stupid she had been not to question Studley. But she had really been startled into mental numbness. Now, as the last note was still vibrating on the air, she sprang to her feet and intercepted Mrs. Harold Keen, who stared at her.

"Do you chance, Mrs. Keen," said Mrs. Manners, with her sweetest accent, "to know Helen Montgomery?"

"Never heard of her," replied Mrs. Keen, sweeping slowly onward.

"Not in the old set," reflected Mrs. Manners, and then she halted Mrs. Fifi Stebbins, of the new set, who answered vaguely, "There are Mont-

gomerys almost anywhere, but I don't recall any Helen."

Then Mrs. Harley Manners chased Mrs. Peter Weismann, who was in neither set, and yet was not in Mrs. Manners' own immediate circle. And she also never heard of this Helen Montgomery. Defeated all along the line, Mrs. Harley Manners returned to her car and directed the chauffeur to take her home. And then kind fortune smiled on her, for almost at her very door she spied Professor Silas Mabon, the distinguished chemist, and she stopped the car to engage him in conversation, which speedily led to the all-important question.

"I know a Helen Montgomery—that is, I know of her, I am not acquainted with her. My niece knows her," said the Professor. "She is the daughter of Edward Montgomery, the great carpet manufacturer."

"Is Mr. Montgomery rich?"

"I have been told that he is worth three or four millions."

"A-h-h-h-h!" whispered Mrs. Manners to her own heart.

CHAPTER II

PHILIP STUDLEY walked along Fifth Avenue, and turned into a side street, where he entered a club. It was not a fashionable club, nor one in which the sons of millionaires would be found. It was one of those quiet unobtrusive retreats which, in the midst of the turmoil of New York's wild pursuit of wealth and social distinction, thrive in the green peace of intellectual obscurity. Studley, being a newspaper writer, knew all sorts and conditions of men, but those who frequented this club, he felt, were of his own people. Perhaps he would have known more had he gone oftener to the club, but for the most part he dwelt in a little world colored by the rays of his own imagination. He was very young, and had much to learn. In the club he found a letter. He recognized the clear, strong handwriting, and, lighting a cigar, he retired to a quiet corner to read.

“ I suppose you will be not in the least astonished,” said the writer, “ to learn that I am going to be married, and to Leander Barrett. I am just a little astonished myself, for I hardly know how it arrived. It finished itself so suddenly that I have not yet caught my breath. You see, I knew Leander slightly when he was in college. He was a great friend of my cousin, Billy Montgomery—you know him—and it was through this that I met him. Of course, at that time I did not dream that he had so much in him. He seemed to me to be just an ordinary college boy, and I enjoyed his chaff and chatter, and passed him on just as women always pass on nice boys. But when I began to read of his achievements abroad in such a wide variety of art works, I saw that I had failed to measure his character at all. Strangely enough, when he came back to this country and began to sing at the opera, I did not meet him. He seemed to have drifted into a totally new set. I suppose that the exclusively musical set lives quite by itself. At any rate, no one in the set in which I have passed my life seems to know anything or care

anything about music. It is all literature, art, and architecture. You *must* know all about Ghirlandajo and Giotto and Bramante and Petrarch and ever so many others whom I need not mention to you, but if you speak of Josquin des Près or Claudio Monteverde, people stare at you and coldly ask who they were. And if you can tell, you are thought to be a crank. I don't know why I ever became interested in these musical masters, except that they seemed to me to be just as much a demonstration of the intellectual life of their times as the painters and the authors.

“It was only a few months ago that I fell in with Leander again, and it was of all places in the world in a department store. We bumped violently against one another in a crowd, and, as he turned to apologize, he recognized me and exclaimed, ‘Well, Miss Montgomery— isn’t it?’ And, of course, I admitted that it was. He asked me if I remembered him, but made no attempt to tell me his name. He seemed to take it for granted that I knew who he was now. Naturally he supposed that I was a music lover. So we went

out of the shop together, and I took him uptown in my car. We had a pleasant talk, and—that was the beginning of it. Somehow the affair rushed itself along, and before I really was sure that I knew him, he asked me the great question. I am telling you all this, Philip, because in a sort of way it is your right to know it. You have been my closest friend, and I believe you really understand me. So if I say frankly to you that I accepted Leander without much consideration, you will comprehend me when I add that no sooner had I done it than I realized that I would not have it undone for all the world. Can you gather that? I believe I'm just a woman, after all. Anyhow, I know now that I love Leander, and that I honor him above all men. His art is as much a religion to me as it is to him. It is good to hear him talk about the art of voice production, Philip. It reminds me of the times when you have talked to me about your art, only now I am listening with new ears and an inspired understanding. I wonder if women who are beloved of business men and have to listen to them talk-

ing about short stock and breaks in the market and running the bears to cover and all that sort of thing can listen with inspired understandings.

“ Oh, I am blessed, Philip, to be the chosen of a great artist, a master who has wonderful messages of beauty to give to the world. But you don't want to hear that, do you? I am sure you have suspected that this was coming, but I was not sure of it myself. You are the first person outside of the family to whom I have given the news. The engagement will not be announced till Monday. We are to be married in three weeks, for Leander, as you know, does not remain till the end of the season. We sail right after the ceremony, and he is not going to sing at all in the summer. We are going to have a real honeymoon, as Mr. and Mrs. Lee Barrett, in out-of-the-way places. He was not willing to wait till he came back for the next season, and we both felt that we did not wish to be separated for all those months. I dare say some people will regard it as a hasty wedding, but we who live in a world far above that known by the ludicrous ‘ society people ’ will not be

troubled. So I shall go to Europe with him and come back with him when he returns for next season. Meanwhile, Philip, I have told him that you are my best friend, and that he must not object. Do you know, he smiled and seemed greatly pleased to know that we were such friends, and when I told him that I should like to write to you from Europe, he said, 'By all means, you must not let such a friendship as that fall away.' Wasn't it dear of him, Phil?"

And Phil thought it was.

The spreading of the great news was rapid. In the evening of the same day it rushed with electric speed through the atmosphere of a queer little Italian restaurant, whither some of the divine singers of the opera company went to eat their dinners. An opera company is one of the most peculiar of human institutions. It is a pushing, eager, suspicious community, in which the largest of human passions and the meanest of human jealousies jostle and elbow one another at all hours and in all circumstances. There are castes, and there are iron gates through which the lower may

not pass to the higher. Away up in the blinding glare of that sun of publicity, which rises with the morning paper and sets only with the last edition of the evening, dwell the royalties of the opera realm, those mighty princesses and princes whose number of appearances are guaranteed for the season, and who do not receive salaries, but "cachets," often rising to the proud proportions of four figures. These masters do not dine in little Italian restaurants. The most palatial hotels provide them with gorgeous apartments, armies of lackeys, and food with French titles. Some of them even set up private domiciles for the season, and display at least the outward semblance of a social dignity equal to that of their employers.

Little Italian restaurants are for singers who accept salaries, who humbly take so much a month and sing as often as the merciless impresario wishes. And there are other lines of distinction, moral rather than financial, among the citizens of opera land. There is, for instance, the company of uninteresting women. Some of them have husbands whom they love and do not divorce. These

women bear children and rear them with tenderness and intelligence. Also among the uninteresting women are those honest and ambitious beginners, who foolishly worship before the altar of the chaste Diana, refusing the helping masculine hands readily proffered to them at so small a cost as a transfer of their devotion to a different goddess. These vestals remain in the gloom of minor rôles and wearily wend their ways through season after season with painfully slow progress toward the glories of the realm. None of these women can appear in this chronicle. They do not fashion history of this kind. Sometimes they create history of another kind, important and even epoch-making in the realm of art, but of no value as material for the professional gossip.

As for those women who figure in all animated chronicles of the present kind, some of them may have had husbands, but they have tried to forget them, and usually with success. Little Italian restaurants, with hot and opaque atmospheres, are in accord with their temperaments, for their part

of the opera world is hot and opaque at all seasons of the year.

It was not a pretty place, that particular Italian restaurant. All the men in it seemed to require cigarette smoke as a condiment for food, and they chewed and puffed alternately. The room was filled with a wreathing blue fog, through which strange head-dresses and still stranger gowns could be seen, for the denizens of this world always garb themselves in streamers of splendor and look not unlike perambulating lamp shades.

They were not only singers. Some were impecunious painters and some were patrons of the arts, who were wont to shout "bravo" from the highest seats in the temple. It gave them a fine satisfaction to eat within reach of real singers. And they were not all Italians, for one feast of spaghetti makes the whole world of Bohemia kin. And some of the opera singers had their own notions about what was going on in the life of the great tenor who ate his meals in gilded palaces. They had no official information, but the gossip mill of an opera house grinds exceeding small.

“Who is it, this Montgomery?” asked Feramordi, the Italian contralto, as she drank down Chianti in great noisy gulps. On the stage she was majestic in stride and tragic in tone, this Feramordi, but she did not eat prettily at all. She had never rid herself of the ghost of her hungry days in the Santa Lucia quarter before her voice was discovered.

“A society woman, is she not?” said Tremontini, the light barytone, who was sure he could sing Amonasro, while every one else was sure he could not.

“No,” replied Abadista, the general utility barytone, “I know. I always know. Her father is a carpet maker.”

“Well,” said Feramordi, “and in this country she can be in what they call their best society, these beasts of Americans—they have no aristocracy, the shop-keeping, stock-selling pigs.”

They were all speaking Italian, of course, but Tremontini looked fearfully around and said in a whisper:

“Careful, careful, my dear; some dog will be

carrying your words to one of the stockholders, and you may fall upon evil days."

"What do I care?" she said, affecting a courage which she did not feel. "I am the Feramordi, am I not? I have all Europe and South America in which to sing, have I not?"

"Yes, yes, yes, a thousand and one times yes, my darling; but I do not wish to go to South America."

"Then go to Tophet," she exclaimed, hurling an evil look into his eyes; "I can live without you."

They were not man and wife, either, these two, and surely never would be. Their quarrels enlivened the life of the opera house, and always ended in the same way. They invariably went home together after a performance. Habit was their master. They leaned upon one another instinctively.

"But yet," continued Abadista, who at last got another opportunity to speak, "she is not of this American shop-keeping and stock-swindling aristocracy. She is of the outside. She has much

money, but she does not dine and dance with any of those who applaud us from the boxes. She is unknown among them."

"Does she attempt music?" asked Tremontini.

"Alas, I do not know that," replied the utility man.

"Via via!" exclaimed Feramordi; "what difference does it make? If she is an amateur musician, they will fight because she will know a little. If she is not, they will also fight, because she will be a fool and will know nothing."

For a few minutes the three said nothing further. Their busy mouths were occupied with spaghetti. From the next table floated scraps of conversation. Those who sat there were French and Polish members of the company. They were not on bad terms with the Italians, but they knew that Feramordi and Tremontini bullyragged each other all through meals, and they were wiser than Abadista, who was just stupid enough to intrude upon the ferocious lovemaking of the barytone and contralto. One could not help hear-

ing, however, a few words of the French chatter, which was also about the gossip of the day.

“And why,” demanded Madeleine Piroux, the exquisite little French soprano, “shall I not ask Leandro who and what his *chère amie* is?”

“Because, most adorable of women,” replied Ponitzky, the Polish bass, “you are just a little *épris* of the Baroni yourself.”

“Don’t be jealous, Ladislas,” she said, throwing a piece of bread at his mustache; “you know that I love only you—to-day.”

“And whom to-morrow?”

“To-morrow? Oh, what can one tell of to-morrow? It is always—to-morrow.”

“But, nevertheless, you will not ask him to-morrow or the next day.”

“Eheu! I suppose he would smile so enchantingly and show his beautiful teeth and begin to talk about our joint appearance in Philadelphia—*sacré nom!* how can one say the word!”

And the sum and substance of it all was that the members of the opera company had just got wind of the affair, and they really knew little

enough. They had learned that Baroni was in love with a Miss Montgomery, but who she was they could not tell. Nor did they know that there was to be a wedding so soon or, indeed, that there was to be one at all, for being in love did not in the operatic half-world necessarily imply a wedding. But on one point they were all perfectly agreed, and that was that if there was a wedding, the woman was a fool. For they were morally certain that no woman not brought up in their sphere could dwell peaceably with one of its denizens. They were not at all given to self-study, these sublime egoists of the world of music. They never thought about themselves in that way. They regarded themselves as arrived, as complete, as finished products of the wisdom of nature. But they were satisfied that the rest of humanity dwelt on a level far below theirs, and that only the sublime people of their own planet could understand them. So there was no reason why every one should not say that the woman was a fool. Oh, it would, perhaps, be beautiful for a few weeks, but what would she do if Baroni should

have one of his grand attacks of the ego? To be sure, they had another name for it, but that was what it was. Had he not nearly bitten off the ear of Tremontini one night in "Cavalleria" just because that honest and prosaic barytone had got six recalls after the duo with Nagy Bosanska, the Santuzza of the evening? And, perhaps, he was enraged also at the Bosanska, but men did not show anger at her. If they did, she just looked deep into their eyes and they forgot. Bosanska was much more to be feared than Baroni's ego, for he was only an American, while she was a mystery.

Some said that she was a Calabrian whose father had slain her mother because he was not her father. But others declared that she was nothing so cheaply melodramatic as a Calabrian. Some held that she was the daughter of a Moscow Jew by a Tartar mother. Others declared that she was the child of an Austrian nobleman and a Dalmatian peasant woman. None of them really knew, for Nagy Bosanska was still a mystery. And since they were all a little afraid of her, they

asked her no questions. Men had asked Nagy questions away back in the past, and had got looks for answers, and for the sake of those looks they had sunk into hell. It was the best and the worst of all things to love Nagy Bosanska, as some men in different parts of the world could tell. But the one who could tell best of all was silent forever, for he was the Hungarian gipsy who had shot himself on a mountainside above Csorba, when a certain Viennese nobleman had discovered the Bosanska's voice and taken her away to the capital to study—under his protection.

And Nagy Bosanska, sitting in the retirement of her apartment in Madison Avenue, and dining in peace, accompanied by her ancient and subservient companion, smiled as if her thoughts were most amusing.

"Why do you smile, Doushka?" asked Mme. Melanie, the companion.

"Don't talk Russian," said Nagy fiercely; "you know I hate it."

"Holy saints!" said poor Melanie to herself, "I forgot that it was the favorite pet name of that

Viennese devil. What a pity she does not find a lover who will also be a master. The Viennese terrorized her. All other men have been her slaves." Then she said aloud: "Forgive me, dear one. I am an old fool."

"But I will tell you," said Nagy Bosanska with an inscrutable look in her gray-green eyes; "I smile because a tenor is in love with a doll baby."

Which shows that Nagy Bosanska knew nothing at all about the matter. And in this she was neither better nor worse than the rest of the opera company. For Leander Barrett, despite his considerable experience in the opera realms, was yet an American, and he had a way of keeping his affairs to himself. If he had told any one, however, it certainly would not have been Nagy Bosanska, for he regarded her with a supreme indifference. He liked to sing with her because she ⁺was tremendous; but off the stage he preferred the American members of the company, who were all cordially hated by the European members.

Nevertheless, Mme. Melanie observed later that the serpent was unusually alive this day in the green eyes of Nagy, and she was very glad that she was neither the tenor nor his bride-to-be.

CHAPTER III

“NAGY BOSANSKA, will you sing at my wedding?” whispered Leandro Baroni.

“Yes,” she answered in something like a hiss, “and dance at your funeral.”

“You are most obliging,” said Leandro.

“And you are merely stupid,” commented Nagy.

At the moment they were walking hand in hand toward the cathedral in the second act of “Lohengrin,” and the audience was intent upon the beauty of the scene. The thrill of it all had penetrated the house, and there were many who would have sworn that these two great artists had so identified themselves with their rôles that they really lived the lives of Lohengrin and Elsa. As the orchestra thundered the brazen echo of “Nie sollst du mich befragen,” and Ortrud stood threatening below the steps, Baroni and Bonsanska, who could play charmingly on the surface of Wagner’s

music, passed slowly from the sight of the audience. And he was saying to her:

“What will you sing?”

“I will sing,” she answered, “‘*Mon cœur s’ouvre à ta voix.*’”

And as she slipped from his encircling arm and started toward the front to take her curtain call, she smiled at him an inscrutable and disconcerting smile.

“It is a contralto number,” he said to himself, “but that creature can sing anything with her two octaves and a half. I wonder if Helen will think it has any personal meaning directed at her.”

By this time he was bowing gracefully over the Bosanska’s hand in front of the curtain, while the audience applauded and the standees shouted “bravi.” As the two passed out of the public sight, he said:

“Nagy Bosanska, you shall not sing the song of Dalila at my wedding.”

“No? Then I sing nothing.”

And so it came about that little Madeleine Piroux and Tremontini were the singers who did the duty

of artistic fellowship at the wedding two days after the "Lohengrin" performance. Leandro made his farewell appearance for the season as the Swan Knight, and went home to see his luggage made ready for Europe.

The wedding-day was not altogether a success, for it was soft and foggy, and all the opera people were in evil humor. Even Leandro was surly when he arose and tramped ill-temperedly about the room, sounding his middle C and shaking his head because it was veiled. But presently he smiled a little.

"It is not I who must sing to-day. I have only to marry," he thought. "And then away, far away from everything but love for months to come."

A knock at the door startled him. It was only his valet. The wedding was set for an early hour, so that the happy couple might take the steamer immediately after the ceremony. Helen had vainly pleaded for a quiet wedding entirely in private, but Leander had assured her that his position as a public man demanded certain sacrifices.

It must be in a church; some of the company must sing; their pictures must appear in the next day's newspapers, and the reporters must be furnished with full particulars.

"It is only for this once," said Leander; "when we come back, it will all be an old story, and I shall no longer be a subject for romantic reports. I shall be an old married tenor."

And Helen sighed her resignation. After all, they would not see the newspapers, for they would be far out on the ocean, and then for months they would be buried in out-of-the-way places in Europe. Leander knew so many little nooks and corners, where tourists never went, and there they two would go and forget the rest of the world. So she faced the church wedding and the photographers at the door with calm courage.

In her wedding garb and treading the path toward the altar she was, perhaps, not quite the Helen Montgomery of every-day life; but still, even the operatic guests confessed that she was good to see. She was not a very tall woman, but the noble lines of her figure gave her an appearance

of height, and her walk, which was the incarnation of feminine dignity, added to the illusion. From somewhere in the far back generations of her people she had got a dainty fineness of bone and a satin sheen of creamy skin. The crimson in her cheeks was usually that of the rose, though now she was unwontedly pale. But the sweet profundity of her steady, but soft, gray-brown eyes was unruffled. She breathed an atmosphere of perfectly poised, aristocratic, intellectual womanhood. But it was no chilled atmosphere, for Helen was adorably human and desirable. There was a tempting fullness of the lips, a gracious roundness of the bosom, and a deepness in the strong respiration which bespoke the existence of a slumbering passion ready to be awakened to a splendid life.

As she moved bravely forward, she was happily unconscious of the strange and motley crowd in the little church. All that she saw was the relentless perspective of the narrow aisle terminating in the dimly lighted altar before which she was to kneel, while the crown of life was laid upon her

brow. Her eyes fixed themselves upon it, and she moved unfalteringly toward it as one in a vision. She did not even see Leander, standing there in all the splendor of his six feet of straight, slim manhood, waiting for her to deliver her future into his hands. She did not hear the opera-house orchestra and the church organ thundering the "Coronation March" from the "Prophet"—Leander had vowed that he would not have that deadly "Lohengrin" music. She saw the cross over the altar, and behind it a blurred picture of a drooping figure with outspread arms. Her soul was floating toward celestial regions. Helen was consecrating herself to the stupendous conditions of wifehood, and as she walked forward she silently prayed that she might wear worthily her crown; for the cross behind the altar did not seem to be for her.

Twice in the course of the ceremony the sounds of song were heard. In neither instance was it the song which Leander had chosen. The wretches treated the affair as if it were a Sunday-night concert and changed the programme at will.

The light, transparent, silver tones of Madeleine Piroux wafted out into the church Alessandro Stradella's "*Se amor m'annoda il piede*," which caused Leander to smile faintly and with a certain indulgence. Tremontini sang "*Sous les pieds d'une femme*," from Gounod's "*La Reine de Saba*," and the drift of the words made a momentary impression even upon the absorbed spirit of Helen, so that she lowered her head and blushed in her sweet humility. As for Leander, he communed briefly with himself:

"Tremontini well knows that he will not meet me again till next season, and by that time I shall have forgotten that I ought to kick him."

When the ceremony was over the orchestra played the inevitable Mendelssohn wedding march. Helen was Mrs. Barrett in private life, and Mme. Baroni in the palpitating world of art. Her life had doubled at the altar. She was two personages, or, rather, one person and one personage. But she did not realize it then. She had so much to learn, and she was so sure that she already knew. So she had also much to unlearn.

The automobile was waiting at the door. Some of the singers crowded about them as they came out, and tried to embrace either the bride or the bridegroom. It made no difference to them, so long as they could give an emotional performance in the presence of the photographers from the evening papers lined up at the curb. Press agents ran up and down the line making sure that the actors in this historic scene were correctly identified. Leander and Helen hastened into the car, and the chauffeur gave a loud toot. In A flat, Tremontini said it was, for he claimed to possess absolute pitch, but he often sang out of tune. The vehicle sped away, and the singers turned and hesitated, for they found themselves mixed with a crowd quite new to them. The friends of Helen stared at these strange creatures, and said to one another:

“How remarkable!”

And the singers stared back and said to one another:

“People who come from nowhere and go back there.”

They had small esteem for those whom they did not recognize as opera-goers.

"Hein! These Americans they are so rich and so stupid," declared Madeleine Piroux, who had emerged from the church.

"But they pay the money," remarked Tremon-tini philosophically.

"Bien! That is what Americans are for," declared Madeleine with an air of finality.

"Shall we go to their luncheon?" asked Ponitzky, who had not breakfasted.

"Idiot!" answered Feramordi; "would I wish to answer their ten thousand foolish questions? You will take me to Henri's and we shall hide from every one."

"Adorable angel," murmured Ponitzky, who hated Henri's.

And so these great "artists," to whom an inscrutable Providence had confided the interpretation of noble dramatic poems, and whose pulsating interpretations nightly set thousands of souls a-tremble, went their several ways, and the worshipping public continued to worship from the

other side of that yawning gulf, the orchestra pit.

Helen and Leander tarried not long at the luncheon. Their steamer was to sail at three. They had yet to make some minor changes in their garb. At half-past one, while the hungry ones were still at the tables, they slipped away. Only Helen's father bade them adieu. The car went noiselessly down the street, and so Helen passed out of her old world and faced her new one. She sat back with her eyes half closed, trying to gather her forces, for, although she was not of the hysterical type, and though a wedding was not a social ceremony to her, she had passed through an excitement which puzzled her, because it was of a new order. She faced the mental situation as she rode toward the steamer. It cleared itself quickly, for her will was strong.

She saw herself touched by the consciousness that she was the bride of an artist. She smiled slowly as she measured that. After all, an artist was first a man, and a man was a human being, like herself. Suppose she had been marrying an

architect, would she have had that same sense of being translated into a foreign sphere? She thought not. Suppose her husband were a financier, or even a politician with huge visions of power. Would she have had the same feeling? She knew she would not. Then, where ran the imperceptible line which separated the architect from the singer? Was Palestrina made of a different clay from Bramante? Ideals, yes, there was the difference. But each had them. They differed merely in their investiture. Leander was hardly a Palestrina, but he was a king among singers. Palestrina was the Prince of music. Surely Leander's pure and chaste ideals might fairly be classed with those of the great son of Sante, but there was nothing into which she could not enter. And in all else he was only a man, like a stockbroker or a carpet manufacturer. And she understood dear old Papa better than he understood himself.

So, presently, she looked up with a brave show of confidence, and found Leander looking down into her eyes with such a genuine tenderness that

she was profoundly moved by it. A sudden wave of faith and comfort rushed over her, and left her with a deep peace in her soul. She lifted her face instinctively, and Leander, leaning down, murmured:

“ My wife.”

And he kissed her on the lips—a long, gentle clinging kiss, that had no touch of passion, but rather was an act of consecration. It was at that moment, though he never knew it, that his love reached its zenith.

“ Lee,” she said, “ it seemed a little strange to me for a moment; but now I am happy.”

“ What seemed strange, dear? ”

“ I felt as if I had strayed out of my own world into one unknown to me.”

“ Well, in a sense that is true. But I fancy your feeling that way was due to your becoming the wife of a sort of public man, you know what I mean—stepping out into the glare of the footlights. You see, you’ll have to face my glory.”

He smiled and spoke lightly, but the words

jarred upon her. She was not thinking of his fame, but of his inner world. After all, though, she could not expect to knock at its door and hear him say, "Come in," and thus complete everything. No, she would have to invade this wonderful new territory slowly.

"I was thinking rather of your ideal world," she said softly.

"Yes, I see," he said pensively; "but you'll get used to that. It really is not hard."

And again she wondered if she had not stupidly failed to make herself understood. She was silent for a few minutes, and then the car rolled up to the pier. As it did so, he turned his eyes full upon hers and said:

"Look here, sweetheart, we are going away on a vacation; I don't want to talk shop."

"Shop?" she echoed.

"Yes, art and singing and opera and all that sort of thing. That's my trade, you know, and in vacation I like to forget it for a time. And this is going to be the greatest vacation of my whole life. We are going away, you and I, into secret

corners, and we aren't going to think of anything in the world except our love."

And as they went on board the ship she was still wondering how he intended to separate their love from a partnership in the thing that made his intellectual life. But, after all, what he doubtless meant was that they should not purposely enter into discussions of musical subjects. Of course, enlightening remarks would fall from his lips from time to time, and she would gradually acquire a deeper and surer knowledge of his ideals. And then, in the season they would be absorbed in these beautiful thoughts, for he would be living in the world of the imagination.

And because they had exacted a promise that no one should come to see them off, they stood comfortably in a corner of the deck and watched the big pier recede. When the ship had pointed her bows at the Narrows, Helen resolutely turned her back on New York, and, leaning on her husband's arm, gazed at the blue rim beyond Fort Hamilton. Somewhere behind that she would really begin her new life.

CHAPTER IV

“YES,” said Helen; “but it seems a pity to leave this paradise of rest.”

Leander twirled the sun umbrella and looked up and down the Paquier. It was late in the afternoon, and automobiles, laden with foolish American tourists from Aix, were speeding along the level road and sending clouds of dust into the dignified face of the solemn Prefecture building. Children were beginning to gather in the cool shadows under the wide-spreading trees, and far across the lake the first faint touches of purple were stealing into the thousand hollows of the majestic Tournette. The bugles were sounding the retreat, and some two score baggy-kneed infantrymen of the gallant Fifty-fifth Brigade were forming in line behind the Casino to march back to their barracks after an hour of field exercise in the hot sun.

The lake, a marvelous well of undefiled green,

was shining like a moon, and the splendid Savoy mountains looked paternally down upon it and sheltered it and shut out the silly world from it. The mountains, modest after Jungfraus and Matterhorns, and therefore not advertised to travelers, sang silent songs against the lambent sky, and the rain, which so often drifts across them in the wet season, lingered far away, leaving the mighty shoulder of the Parmelan standing forth clear and strong like a buttress of the world. Helen sighed, and quoted:

“ ‘But list; a voice is near;
Great Pan himself, low whispering through the reeds,
Be thankful thou: for if unholy deeds
Ravage the world, tranquillity is here.’ ”

Leander smiled with an expression of indulgence in his luminous eyes, and quoted in his turn:

“ ‘Ich weiss nicht was soll es bedeuten,
Dass ich so traurig bin.’ ”

“ ‘But that,’ declared Helen, “is a song of a river.”

“ ‘Quanti volt al ciaar de luna
Mi t’ho dit de vorett ben.’ ”

Leander sang this sotto voce and Helen made a little mouth of mutiny.

“And that,” she said, “is a song of an over-rated lake where Americans tramp in one another’s footsteps and try to imagine themselves thrilling with forbidden passions in the bosky groves of the Villa Serbeloni, where still linger the perfumes of many roses and the echoes of the voice of the beautiful Carrarà.”

“You like this lake better than Como or Garda, don’t you?”

Helen rose and sighed.

“Nothing is better than this, but one does not make comparisons with Garda. Leave Claude Melnotte’s pastel picture also out of the question.”

“Well,” said Leander, laughing, “you are a lady of lakes anyhow, and to-morrow you must look at another, Lemán, beloved of your friend Byron.”

“I am, indeed, sorry to go,” said Helen simply; “we have been happy here far from the madding opera houses, and now—must we really go?”

“My dear, you know it is all settled. I could

not break my pledge to Lilli. I promised her two years ago that whenever she called upon me to aid her in the Mozart festival I would do so. She has claimed the fulfilment of my promise. Of course, I could send word that I was indisposed—unable to travel or——”

“No,” interrupted Helen; “you must not descend to any of the petty things. We shall go. Perhaps I shall like Salzburg.”

And so the following day they left the shores of the lake of eternal green, and, in a train filled with tourists from Aix, rolled into Geneva in time to make a comfortable connection for Zurich. Thence they traveled onward, and still onward, to Romanshorn and across the wayward Bodensee into sleepy Lindau, and out again with the express to sophisticated Munich. And still another day they whirled eastward till the salty sides of the Austrian Alps rose above the horizon and the train boomed into Salzburg, and they plunged into the turmoil of the pompous little custom house. A few minutes later they walked into the Hôtel Europe, and out of a chair in the rotunda elevated

itself the majestic figure of the great Lilli, who maternally kissed Leander on the brow and turned with a smile to Helen:

“And this is the ‘heilige Braut’; she is not angry with me that I kiss him, for see, my hair is growing white, and I am an old woman, and I heard him cry when he was a baby.”

And for answer Helen put up her sweet young lips for a kiss, and, having got it, said gently:

“I have never heard you sing, dear Frau Lilli, but in America they still speak of you with veneration, and I am glad that you are Leander’s friend.”

“Yes,” said the great woman reflectively; “I am his friend. I hope to live to see him grow wise. He is a good child, but—a child.”

Helen made no answer, for she did not penetrate the meaning of the great woman’s utterance. A little later, when she was alone in her room, looking out toward the Hohen Salzburg, she recalled the uneasy hours of their honeymoon. For they had lingered by lakes and mountains without finding that perfect peace to which she had looked

forward. Leander was tender and affectionate, but from the first she was conscious that his thoughts had begun to wander. Sometimes he unsuccessfully tried to suppress a sigh, and when she asked him why he sighed, he denied that he had done so. The young wife was troubled. They sat upon the shore at Stresa and watched the blue shadows above Pallanza. They saw the Alps across the Zeller See flame in the splendor of a July sunset. They had seen the glories of Grenoble and the peace of Annecy. But always Leander's mind was out of tune. His thought was making flights of its own to some other world. He had not sung a note till just before they started for Salzburg. He had given his wonderful voice a real rest. Then, as they walked through the galleries of the Gorge du Fier, Leander suddenly sang a scale of an octave and a half, ending with a clarion B flat, and as the echoes of it rang among the rocks, he threw back his head boyishly and laughed.

"I'll bet this alley never heard anything like that before."

And presently he was sure of it, for a guide approached him and said:

“Monsieur has a good voice for singing. He should go to Paris and study.”

Lilli's letter had changed Leander's moods entirely. It was only then that Helen began to understand. The moment her husband knew that he was about to return to the public gaze, he became buoyant in spirit, and his affectionate demonstrations toward his bride were more spontaneous and sincere. Helen sighed.

“I suppose,” she said to herself, “that it is useless to expect an operatic artist to be entirely happy except when he is exercising the spell of his art. I foresee that a part of my business as a wife will be to grasp this situation. Leander is a man with a mission. Nature has set him apart from others by the gift of a voice and an artist's soul. It is for me to help that soul to perform its office in the world. If I am to be the help that is meet for him, this I must do.”

The next day after their arrival at Salzburg there was a rehearsal of “Don Giovanni.” Helen

had never before attended a rehearsal, and Leander had tried to persuade her to remain away, but she pleaded to be present, and said she would sit in a dark corner where no one would see her, and would be very quiet. Leander dubiously said he would ask Lilli, but the great woman promptly granted permission, and smiled graciously when she did so. Already she had discerned that the sweet young bride was treading wholly unfamiliar paths, and perhaps she thought that the sooner the girl learned true things the better it would be for her. But she failed to count upon the fact that Helen was still looking at the world of art through rose-colored spectacles; and, furthermore, that a rehearsal at Salzburg was not quite in the common order of things operatic.

It was all so strange to Helen. It almost destroyed some of her pet illusions to see Leander as Don Ottavio walking about in a gray suit of New York clothes, and wearing a straw hat, while Lilli, with her hat off and her noble gray-crowned head revealed in all its majesty, looked Donna Anna in spite of her modern, yet nondescript,

walking-frock. The theater was gloomy and the atmosphere half-chilled. There was a musty odor with a singular tang of moldy glue in it. Faint traces of gas could also be detected, and the one weak sunbeam which strayed across the ceiling seemed to be half-obliterated by circling particles in the crowded air.

The conductor wore a broad slouched hat and had long oily hair. He beat time mechanically, and seldom spoke to his men. The Zerlina, a youthful prima donna, lately sprung into note and highly conscious of the fact, sat at one side of the stage. She wore an enormous hat with a brilliant green feather drooping over her shoulders, and carried a small dog entirely disguised in white wool. Lilli cast a Junoesque eye on her, and the glance seemed to bode her no good. The barytone, who was impersonating Don Giovanni, spent all his spare time bending over the Zerlina. Helen smiled at this, and wove her own little romance, which was some thousands of miles from the truth. The Donna Elvira was a German, and a devoted adorer of Lilli. They called one another

by first names, but Lilli was not polite when she was displeased with anything which Donna Elvira did.

They all sang in suppressed tones. They were saving their voices for the performance. The Leporello, a gigantic Pole with a notable girth, piped and whistled the "Madamina" till Lilli suddenly cried, "Lieber Gott, das ist kein Gesang. Singe, singe!"

"My dear Lilli," answered the Leporello urbanely, "won't you be good enough to speak Italian? I know this part in four languages, and I must keep to one, or I shall become confused."

Whereupon the great woman launched a tempest of Italian at him and he shook his huge head deprecatingly, and began again. This time he let loose the mighty volume of his big voice, and Lilli raged once more:

"Man, man, you will raise the dead Commendatore in the wrong scene."

For always it was Lilli who directed the rehearsal. The conductor beat time, and occasionally scolded at a second violin, but he held his

peace for the most part, except once when he made a blunder in the harpsichord part, which he played to accompany the recitativo secco. Lilli then bestowed upon him several uncomplimentary titles, and he looked up mildly and said:

“Gnädige Frau, I am too small to carry so many names.”

To all this Helen listened with some wonder, for she had expected to hear learned discussions about the correct reading of Mozart's great numbers, or to find the singers going over phrases again and again till they had them precisely right. The whole rehearsal seemed to her to be pitched upon a low level, far removed from the regions of artistic ideals. When it was over, she and Leander went for a drive to Hellbrunn, where they took their afternoon coffee. While seated at the table, Helen expressed her feelings to Leander.

“But, my dear,” he replied, “we do not have to study the rôles now. We have all sung them scores of times. Lilli must have done Anna a hundred times. All that we have to do is bring things together. We have to get into the same

picture, you know. That is the main object here. Now, in New York, we don't care whether we are all in the same picture or not, for no one there knows or cares. We sing every man and woman for himself. The public has been trained there to go to hear singers, and each one aims at making his greatest points in his own most certain way. But here we must give 'Don Giovanni' in one style together, and that is what the great Lilli is after. You will see, it will all come out beautifully. As for me, I do not have to bother. You noticed that Lilli hardly spoke to me?"

"Yes," said Helen. "She seemed content to let you go your own way."

"You see," said Leander complacently, "Lilli knows that I am the best Don Ottavio in Europe, and that my arias are certain to set the audience wild."

Helen shrank a little at these words, but in a moment she remembered that Lilli had said he was still only a child, and the vanity of children is always twin sister to their frankness.

She did not go to any more rehearsals. She

felt that in the future, when Leander was settled for long seasons in opera houses, she would be driven into going in order to be near him, and study him in the behind the scenes of his art. But it was not necessary yet, and in some dim way she found the thing depressing. She had watched painters making pictures, and sculptors modeling statues, and found it inspiring; but this thing was quite the opposite. Perhaps it was too much like sitting beside a pianist when he was practising. At any rate, she decided to defer further experiences of this kind till they were required of her.

The evening of the performance of "Don Giovanni," the first of the festival series, found her seated in the theater in a sort of dull torpor. Her expected enthusiasm had deserted her. She cared only that the festival should come to an end. She wished heartily to go away from Salzburg. She hated the Mozarteum with the great staring portrait of Lilli as Donna Anna set up beside the little yellow book of Maurel on the proper method of performing "Don Giovanni." It seemed to

her almost possible that these people, even the great woman, were using Mozart as a means to increase their own glory. But she dismissed the thought as unworthy of her, and insulting to noble artists. And in the theater, where the people around her whispered about the genius of the composer quite as often as they did about that of Lilli, she still found herself unable to shake off the depression. The performance was really good, but to Helen's uncertain view it was no better than some she had seen in New York. At any rate, that was what she thought till Lilli, gazing with wondrous eyes after the departing Don Giovanni, uttered the words, "Don Ottavio, son morta." Then it was that Helen saw the heavens open and the inner shrine of interpretative art disclosed to her dazzled vision. From that moment the drama became to her a realization of her most beautiful dreams. One flaming shaft of the eloquence of genius had reached her soul and set it afire. Even Leander's "Il mio tesoro" became glorified in her mind, and when the audience, carried away by the ravishing beauty of his tones and

exquisite finish of his cantilena, thundered applause, she thrilled with inexpressible pride.

“Yes,” she thought; “he, too, lives in that mighty world where Lilli lives. The artist is set apart from the rest of us. It will not be so easy to live in that world with him, but that is what I have to do.”

And when the festival was over, more humble in spirit than when she had sat by the margin of the lake of eternal green, Helen went with her husband to Paris, where he was to procure costumes for a new opera before setting sail for the land of golden promise.

CHAPTER V

THE leaves were flying across the yet green sward of Central Park and the first aggressive winds of the early autumn were probing the crannies of the myriad chimneys of the rich on the Fifth Avenue side. Philip Studley was swinging along the walk beside the west drive, his cheeks glowing from healthful outdoor exercise. He walked often in the Park. He loved its sophisticated assumption of rusticity and he had many familiars among the squirrels. But on this day his exercise was destined to be rudely terminated by the sudden apparition of Mrs. Harley Manners in her car. She hailed him from the drive and literally dragged him into her vehicle, where in ten seconds she had him in the seething turmoil of her undying musical chatter.

“I am astonished, Mr. Studley,” she said, “that after being a critic for several seasons you

have not become acquainted with more of the artists."

"I have always felt that it would be bad policy for me to do that," replied the young man. "However, I am very well acquainted with the wife of one and I suppose I shall come to know him well, too."

"Ah, yes," said Mrs. Manners, "I remember. You are a great friend of Mrs. Baroni, are you not?"

"Yes. They are due here on Wednesday's steamer."

"Have you heard anything about their summer?"

"No, only that Baroni sang with immense success at the Mozart festival at Salzburg."

"I suppose you read that in the foreign papers."

"Well, the truth is that Mrs. Baroni was kind enough to send me all the criticisms."

Mrs. Harley Manners pricked up her ears. Possibly this young wife was going to be worth cultivating. At any rate she seemed to perceive

that as a mate for a tenor she had certain well-defined duties.

“ Mr. Studley, do you know where they intend to stay when they arrive? ”

“ Yes,” said Studley unenthusiastically; “ they are going to the Plaza.”

Mrs. Harley Manners let not the day pass before she had ordered a “ floral tribute ” to be placed in the rooms reserved for the great tenor and his wife. Mrs. Manners already had bright visions of the great man at her table. She also pondered somewhat on the possible character of the young wife, and wondered if a young matron who belonged to no “ set ” would be easy to cultivate.

Studley went home to his little room and sat down to prepare certain “ stuff,” as he called it, for the Sunday paper. While he clipped off useless paragraphs from press agents’ matter or ran his pencil through impossible adjectives, he sat wrapped in inner reflection on Helen and her husband. Her two or three letters had given him some small uneasiness. Was she going to make

the lamentable error of supposing that she must forward her husband's interests? Was she going to constitute herself a press agent?

Studley was very young and his knowledge of the world of music was small. He was aflame with beautiful ideals. It hurt him to think that Helen might be an agency in lowering the splendid standards of her husband. No one had written so poetically about Baroni's Lohengrin (which was not poetic) as Studley had. Webster, the oldest of the music critics, had poked fun at him for it, and warned him that in ten years he would be writing more conservatively about better impersonations. But the young man smiled and comforted himself with the thought that the "General" was suffering the pangs of many years. Studley had not been in the habit of going to the opera house except when he was compelled to do so in the discharge of his duties. Some of the scribes called there every day. Some spent much of their time at rehearsals, and they knew all the singers, the conductors, the stage carpenter, the stage managers, and even some of the

orchestra musicians. Some of these scribes wrote more gossip than criticism. One of them always carried a score under his arm and made much pretense of consulting it. But Studley knew none of the gossip which these men knew. He lived in his beautiful world of ideals; and he had it all to himself. But he did not know that.

And so he regretted that Helen had sent him newspaper comments on Baroni's Salzburg triumphs. He called on her one day when he was sure that Baroni was out and stayed only a few minutes. For some reason which he could not define he was uncomfortable in her presence, and he had a singularly strong disinclination to meet Baroni. However, the season was less than two weeks old when the young commentator on musical doings found himself face to face with much that was new to him.

A new opera was to be produced. All the principals had studied their rôles the previous season; for it was a postponed production. The chorus had been at work for a month. Now the early orchestral rehearsals were in progress, rehearsals

without scenery or costumes, of course, but quite sufficient to give expert hearers a clear conception of the composer's artistic methods. Studley went to one of these rehearsals to learn something about the opera, and hid himself in a dark spot under the boxes.

They were all present. The house was full of shadows and the one or two exit lights dimly burning under the boxes accentuated the gloom. The gaping rows of empty orchestra stalls, with here and there the feathers of a woman's hat marking the presence of some spectator, had an air of melancholy. Scrubwomen toiled among the boxes and occasionally peered over the rails and looked with dull curiosity in their eyes at the moving shades in the pit below them.

Scattered about in the orchestra seats were members of the company, some of them interested in the rehearsal, others in those who were rehearsing, and still others killing time by watching their associates at work. A dozen assorted newspaper men sat mostly on the left center aisle. The connection between the front of the house

and the stage was on the left and those who kept continually running from one to the other always assembled on that side. If one wished to know all that was going on, it was imperative to be on that side. Studley was on the other. He went there to keep out of the way. In the front rows, close behind the orchestra rail and also on the left side, sat Mrs. Harley Manners. She had no business whatever at a rehearsal. She was a rank outsider. But she was always present at such affairs. She made it a part of her life's business to be there. In this way she became very friendly with many singers and was able to get them to dine at her house. Besides Mrs. Manners, there were several "society" women. They also had no reason except curiosity for being present at a rehearsal and the impresario and singers resented their presence. But they could not be kept out, because they were either relatives or close friends of directors. They made much trouble for the hard-working impresario. They had many opinions as to how things ought to be done, and these they framed into imperative demands upon their

husbands, brothers, or friends in the Board. None of these women knew anything about music or the stage. Like the majority of their kind, they knew almost nothing about anything. They could prattle fluently in French and they had taken "music lessons" when they were at school. They imagined that there was no more to know. They never read the librettos of the operas nor looked at the scores. They did not know clearly what any opera was about. But they made no hesitation in telling their husbands or brothers that this or that scene was performed entirely incorrectly and that the costumes were vile and that the prima donna ought to be taken out of the part. And what they said had no small power in directing the affairs of the opera house. The two or three who really knew things were wise enough to let the professional musicians alone.

The rehearsal was already in progress when Studley entered the auditorium and slipped into his seat apart from the others. Baroni was sitting in an orchestra stall beside his wife. He did not "go on" till the first act was half done.

Nagy Bosanska, wearing a walking skirt and a silk waist, with her hat off and her lustrous hair dressed high upon her shapely head, was going through a scene with Ponitzky and under her breath calling him "Pig" at every second measure. Ponitzky paid no attention to her. He was concentrating his gaze on the conductor. Presently he shouted:

"Impossible! Impossible! Such a tempo is not to be thought of. It must go twice as fast."

The conductor threw down his baton and tore his hair. "I tell you," he cried, "that I will not be made responsible for such a reading. They shall not say that I am a fool."

And while the two were still wrangling, Helen whispered in Baroni's ear: "Leander, has not the conductor the deciding voice as to tempi?"

"Well, my dear," answered the tenor, "he has theoretically."

"What do you mean?"

"The truth is, Helen, that Ponitzky is not as young as he used to be and he can't sing the air

as slowly as that. He no longer has the breath support."

"But I should think they would give the part to some one else who can sing it slowly enough. It will ruin the music to sing it so fast."

"Yes, it will not be so good; but if they give the rôle to any one else, there will be a lot of trouble with Ponitzky. I think you'll hear the air sung fast."

And for the first time Helen was faced with the idea that artistic considerations sometimes had to yield to the demands of "artists."

"By the way, Helen," said Leander; "isn't that your friend Studley sitting away off there by himself?"

Helen peered into the dark shadows under the boxes for a moment before she recognized Philip.

"Yes, I believe it is. Lee, you have eyes like a ferret."

"I've got to go on pretty soon," said he. "Why don't you invite him to come and sit with you?"

"How can I, if he hides away over there?"

"I think he's looking this way now. Try him."

Helen smiled in Philip's direction and nodded, although she did not believe that he was looking at her. But he was and he returned both bow and smile. Then she beckoned to him. Slowly and apparently with some reluctance he rose and crossed the house.

"I'm so glad, Philip," she said; "Leander has to go on the stage soon and I want you to keep me company. You know my husband, don't you?"

The two men bowed, Philip rather more formally than the tenor.

"I'm glad of this opportunity," said Leander, "to thank you for many kind words."

"You should not thank a critic," replied Philip somewhat coldly. "The artist has only himself to thank. If the critic fails to appreciate the art, he is not fit to be a critic."

"Priggish young pup," thought Leander, as he walked away to go on the stage; "he'll get over all that if he stays in the business."

Which indicated that the tenor had a fine ca-

capacity for misunderstanding. Philip and Helen watched the stage with renewed interest. Nagy Bosanska's scene with Ponitzky had ended some time back, and her long monologue, through which she slid languidly at less than half voice, nodding and whispering and occasionally indicating her tempo with a stamp of the foot for the benefit of the conductor, had come to its conclusion in a sudden burst of liquid tone, let loose at full voice. She turned to greet Leander as he entered. They stood for a moment. Then with her lithe, exquisite body swaying slightly from the hips, her hands clasped behind her, and a flower dangling by its long stem from her crimson lips, she undulated slowly, languorously across the stage till she stood before the tenor. She took the flower from her mouth and struck him gently across the lips with it, and sang:

“ ‘ E bello e ardito.’ ”

Twice she sang the line, as the score required, and then laughed. Helen could not have told why, but a sudden wave of coldness ran swiftly through her veins and vanished, while there

dimly sounded in the remotest chambers of her memory the fate motive in "Carmen." And then she turned to Philip and smiled.

"Do you know Mlle. Bosanska?" she asked.

"No," he answered. "You see, the fact is that I know only two or three of these opera people and none of the important ones at all. Kraft, the German conductor, is the one I know best. He has really fine musicianship and I have learned much from him."

"Listen!" exclaimed Helen; "Leander is actually singing out loud."

"Well, he is not exerting himself," said Philip, "but he is not holding back anything either. I suppose he gives his voice a little exercise sometimes even at rehearsal."

But in a few minutes it became plain to the two listeners that this could hardly be called voice exercise. Leander and Nagy Bosanska had gradually abandoned themselves to the spirit of the scene and before it was ended they were both singing with a fervor of style and a splendor of tone which would have glorified a first perform-

ance. Nagy Bosanska, her form wreathing like that of a sinuous serpent, hurled herself upon him in the ecstasy of the simulated embrace called for by the action and he grasped her in his athletic arms and held her firmly while he pealed out the clarion phrase in which the composer had voiced the first declaration of passion in the opera. The scene ended the act. As the last note sounded from the piano, Nagy Bosanska still standing in Leander's embrace, slowly lifted her eyes to his, and then, springing backward, burst into a ringing and somewhat sardonic laugh. Next she turned and ran off the stage and out into the orchestra stalls, where she fell back into a seat, still laughing. Leander followed her, smiling unconcernedly.

"What moves you to such laughter, Nagy?" he asked.

"Only you," she replied; "but it is that you are such an innocent big baby."

Helen heard this, for the soprano was only two rows in front of her, and a little color crept into her cheeks. She had not yet become familiar

with the freedom of the theater. Leander left the soprano and returned to Helen, but Nagy Bosanska stood up and gazed after him. Then with a sudden silent movement she was at his side.

“And why shall you not introduce me to your beautiful wife?” she said.

“Certainly,” replied Leander with a chilly inflection in his speech. “Helen, this is Mlle. Nagy Bosanska, who is to sing the soprano rôle—and I suppose I may also take the liberty of introducing Mr. Studley to you, Nagy.”

The soprano smiled a slow, strange, inscrutable smile, as she studied the three faces. Then she suddenly laughed aloud.

“Mr. Studley,” she said, “if you were a barytone, and Mrs. Baroni a contralto, we might sing the quartet from ‘Rigoletto.’”

“You are casting my wife for the rôle of Madalena and yourself for Gilda, which you can’t sing. What on earth do you mean, Nagy?” said Leander.

“I don’t know myself. I am half gipsy. I am not bound always to know what my thoughts

mean. They come—they go—piff! like that. But of course Mrs. Baroni could not be a contralto," she added in a slow, low utterance; "they and the barytones are always unhappy in love."

And then with another thin cutting laugh Nagy Bosanska ran back to the stage, while Leander indulgently smiled and the other two looked unutterable questions.

"Don't mind her," said Leander; "she thinks it is her duty to be weird because she has gipsy blood. But it does not mean anything."

But the young newspaper man thought it was artistic temperament.

CHAPTER VI

THE new opera was duly produced and properly applauded by a brilliant audience. The *Herald* had over a column of names of those present. It was a social event. Helen eagerly read all the newspapers the morning after the performance.

"Oh, Lee," she exclaimed, "listen to this in the *Tribune*. 'The composer has published the emotions of his chief actors in a melodic manner of a reactionary. We are invited to listen once again to the strumming of the Bellini guitar.' I think that is just a little too violent, don't you?"

"Oh, you mustn't mind what those fellows say," replied Leander; "you see, their ideas and ours are as far apart as the poles. What he calls the Bellini guitar is nothing more or less than a decent accompaniment under good writing for the voice. This music can be sung. It gives a singer a chance to make a tremendous success."

Helen remained silent for a few moments, for

she was trying to stifle the growing conviction that opera singers placed themselves and their success before the composer and his. This fundamental truth had been flaunted before her senses now several times.

"What does he say about Nagy?" asked Leander.

Helen understood that her husband really wished to know what was said about himself. She had advanced that far in her education as the wife of a tenor. But of course he would ask about Nagy.

"He says that Mlle. Bosanska valiantly endeavored to reduce the heroine to terms of Carmen and almost succeeded, and that she sang with more brilliancy than insight."

"Nagy won't mind that sort of talk. She'll translate that into her own language to this effect: Mlle. Bosanska was an irresistible little gipsy and she sang so that the house rang with bravas. I suppose there is something about the old husband, too."

"Yes," answered Helen with some slight hesi-

tation. "He says that Baroni poured out his glorious voice with his customary prodigality and made all his habitual *ritardandi* and *diminuendi* and used the *mezza voce* in the inevitable places, and that it is a great pity that he has so much vocal skill and so little imagination."

"Humph!" exclaimed Leander; "what does he know about it, I should like to ask? A poverty-stricken scribbler who tries to earn his living by seeming to be smart in the morning after he has been stupid all the evening. He's an *ignoramus*. I always knew he was."

Leander's cheeks were quite crimson by this time and he went and looked out of the window as hard as he could. Helen gazed at him reflectively. Was it true that he lacked imagination? She had never thought about it before. Suddenly he turned and said:

"What does your friend Studley say about the performance?"

Helen searched in the pile of papers till she found that for which Philip wrote, and turning to the amusement page read swiftly.

"Well," she said presently, "he seems to think that the opera is a clever, but superficial work, and that——"

"Oh, bother that rot!" exclaimed Leander. "Let me tell you something, my dear girl; it doesn't make an ounce of difference what these so-called critics say about an opera. They write a lot of pretentious twaddle. Most of them haven't the faintest idea of what it is that makes an opera a success. If the tenor and the soprano have plenty of good melody to sing and one or two lively love scenes with a corking climax, allegro con brio, with a couple of B flats in it, and there is a fair amount of doings for the barytone and contralto, plenty of loud music for the chorus, and a good ballet or procession, it is a tolerably safe bet that the opera will catch on. And that is what we are all in the business for. We are not there for psychology or imaginations or æsthetics. We are there to make the public shout and clap its hands, and hasten to put more dollars in the box office."

Then Helen laughed heartily, for she was as

certain as she was of her own love for him that this was merely Leander's pose. She was sure that no man could sing as he could if he were concerned only with the catchpenny devices of the lyric stage. But long afterward the chilly words came back into her mind. Leander smiled indulgently when he heard the laugh.

"That does my heart good, girlic. These critic fellows take themselves so seriously that they make every one else merry. But you haven't yet told me what Studley says about me."

"He says your singing had all the brilliancy and changing tints of an iceberg," replied Helen softly.

"Well, that's a fine backhander, isn't it? An iceberg, eh! See here, Helen, what sort of a chap is this Studley, anyhow?"

"Surely, Lee, you don't care what he says, do you?"

"No, of course not; but all the same he ought not to write that way about me. I'm the husband of a woman he calls an old and close friend, and it seems to me that he might just as

well make things a little more agreeable for all of us."

"You don't mean that you will show any resentment on account of his criticism, do you?"

"No, of course not. I'm not such a fool as to do that. You have to take these fellows as they come, if you want to get anything out of them in the long run. The idiots are not for sale, you know. People who say they can be bought know nothing about the game. That isn't the way it's done. A little judicious flattery and continual diplomacy are the only weapons. Of course I'm going to be agreeable when I see him, and so must you. You must treat him all the better. Be as sweet as you like to him; I won't mind. It's all in a good cause."

"But I thought you didn't care what these fellows said and that they don't know anything."

"You misunderstood me, girly. I said you must not care what they wrote about an opera, because they don't know. But one naturally cares when they try to make people believe that there's

something wrong with his singing. That's our stock in trade."

After that there was a silence which was not broken till Leander declared that it was time for him to go out and take his morning walk. He always did a swift four miles in the morning, unless it was pouring. Ordinarily bad weather was not considered. One of his peculiarities was that he did not take care of himself after the manner of singers, but after that of college athletes, and that was why he so seldom was "indisposed," as they call it in opera land.

Ten minutes after he had gone, Philip Studley was announced. Helen had told him he might come in any day before luncheon, because his afternoons were usually occupied with concerts. Helen greeted him with unaffected pleasure. His nature was distinctly grateful to her, though for just what reason she could not herself tell. But she did know that instinctively she disclosed to him certain precious bits of her inner life which equally instinctively she did not unshrinkingly lay at the feet of her husband. And yet she knew

that she loved Leander, and that Philip, dear fellow that he was, belonged to the undistinguished fraternity of life-long brothers.

"Leander has just gone for his morning walk," said Helen; "you know he reels off four or five miles every day at a racing pace."

"Yes, I have read all about that in the papers. You know the yellow journalism of to-day makes far more account of the private habits of singers than of their art."

"Certainly," laughed Helen; "it was almost maddening to me at first to find camera men lying in wait for us everywhere, but we don't mind—I mean I don't mind—it now."

"Of course your husband doesn't mind it. He must have grown used to it years ago," responded Philip with a smile.

"Yes," answered Helen thoughtfully, and then for a moment she was silent.

"You know," she continued, as if with a slight effort, "in his profession it is important for him to keep in the public eye."

Philip thought that the right way to do this

was by being a great artist, but he was too wise to say so, and he briefly agreed with Helen. They were both quiet for a few minutes. They were real friends; they did not have to talk incessantly. It was Helen who spoke first.

“ Philip, I often wonder whether a woman can enter perfectly into a man’s ideals.”

“ I should say that depended upon the woman and the ideals.”

“ Sometimes it seems to me that a wife ought not to try to become part of her husband’s intellectual or artistic life, but merely remain on the borders of it as a sentinel to keep away intrusion.”

“ You have your choice of two points of view in the matter,” said the young man, smiling; “ in the first place there is the discriminative theory of Hamerton in his ‘ Intellectual Life.’ He believes that the intellectual man ought to take one of two courses. Either he should marry some simple, dutiful woman who would devote herself entirely to the household and love him trustfully without jealousy of his occupations, or some

highly intelligent woman, willing to undergo the labor of following him in his studies."

Helen answered nothing, for neither of these cases seemed to meet the immediate requirements of her situation.

"Perhaps," said Philip after waiting for the reply which did not come, "you will prefer to think with Weininger that no woman ever knows, or can know or will know, what she does when she mates with a man; but that at any rate she has the power to bridge some difficulties by acting in direct opposition to what she is herself."

Helen looked up with a startled expression on her face.

"Why should a woman do that?" she asked.

"Well, of course," replied Philip, "my knowledge of the married state is pretty small, for, as my friend Hamerton, whom I quoted before, has said, no man really knows anything about any marriage except his own. But I am inclined to think that some wives have to live a rather long and weary falsehood in order to save their married lives from going to wreck."

“It seems to me that neither Hamerton nor Weininger has taken into consideration the state of things which might exist between a man and a woman who were willing to grant each other perfect independence in intellectual matters.”

“Hamerton has written something on that point, but Weininger did not believe that women had real intellects and he did believe that they were incapable of truth. But your independence plan might work well enough where both had intellectual pursuits. But if the wife, for instance, were a great novelist and the husband were only a sportsman, I am afraid there would always be trouble.”

“Yes, but such people would never marry.”

“It’s been heard of,” said Philip with a smile.

“Would you marry a woman who could not share your inner life?”

“Oh, I! Well, you see, I’m an eclectic in all my theories of sex relations. On that particular point I am heart and soul with Ellen Key. There is only one real kind of love and that is the kind which unites the whole nature of the man with

the whole nature of the woman. It is neither all physical or all spiritual, but the fullness of both. Those who have this love know one another. Their union is perfect. They are made truly one and attain the highest glory of living."

Helen rose from her chair and walked quickly to a window. For a few moments she stood looking out into the prosaic vista of the avenue and then turned to Philip, and in a most casual manner, as if serious topics were furthest from her mind, said:

"You didn't care much for the new opera, did you?"

"No, not much. It is smart, and I dislike smartness in all its forms. All little brains are smart. Big ones never are. Think of Michael Angelo or Leonardo da Vinci doing anything smart. Think of Beethoven being smart. No, that is what George Bernard Shaw is, and newspapers cable his gabblings under three thousand miles of ocean and æsthetic hucksters of both sexes prattle them over in the market places. And I am more than half afraid that Richard Strauss

is smart in music in one way just as this new opera's composer is in another. It's all paint and mannerism, like the ridiculous fantasms of the cubists and the futurists. Set one of those silly things beside the disintegrating Last Supper of Leonardo and it looks like a Parisian cocotte in the presence of the Venus de Milo."

Another silence fell upon them. Helen's eyes studied a pattern in the rug at her feet and Philip studied her eyelashes as they fell in a soft shadow on her delicate cheek. How exquisite she was, how perfect an embodiment of the equal balance of physical and spiritual qualities. Philip's admiration was frank; it had an element of adoration. If he had been a Catholic she would have been his idea of the Madonna. Suddenly she looked up and found him gazing straight into her eyes. Her lids trembled just a little and a faint pink crept into her cheeks.

"You cherish ideals, do you not, Philip?" she said in a low voice.

"Of course. They are the best of life. Men live for them, die for them."

“Women have ideals, too,” she said; “and I think sometimes they, too, die for them.”

And after that their talk was most commonplace till Philip went away. In the street he stopped as if an unseen force had hurled itself against him.

“I wonder,” he said to himself, “if everything is all right there. Can it be that the coldness in Baroni’s singing is the reflection of an apathetic nature? But even so, how is it that she has failed to melt the ice? How could any man live near her and not become great?”

It was a question that came back to him more than once in days long afterward. He was not in love with Helen. Perhaps, if circumstances had been right, he might have been. He had often felt the compelling charm of her divine person, but there had never been anything in his feeling for her beyond a strong tenderness. And now as he pondered upon the new doubt in his mind as to her happiness, he wondered more and more whether the tenor really knew that he had taken **into** his home one of the masterpieces of Nature.

CHAPTER VII

IN the swift passage of the crowded New York season, when he had to attend from two to five performances of music in each day and to prepare a page of comment and notes for the Sunday issue of his paper, Philip did not meet Helen again for a month. Neither did he have any conversation with her husband. He was conscious of smoldering antagonism to the popular tenor and he fought against it with all his resolution. Nevertheless there was within him a growing conviction that Leander was a self-centered epitome of artistic insincerity. He studied the man's art with the closest scrutiny, but could find nothing in it below the surface. Yet he dared not write the truth, for he feared that feeling might be leading judgment.

If he had known neither Leander nor Helen, his comments on the tenor's singing would undoubtedly have been such as to arouse a storm in

operatic centers and probably to set the directors to considering once more whether it would not be a proper vindication of the glory of their institution to cease advertising in Philip's paper, stop issuing his tickets, and exclude him from the house. But Philip wrote with reserve and harped heavily on the beauty of Leander's voice and the perfection of his technic.

If he had only known it, this was all that Leander wished. Philip had yet to learn that musicians, especially singers, almost never discuss anything but technical points. Meanwhile matters were moving in a direction which threatened the general peace. Day by day Helen found herself plunging deeper and deeper into a sea of doubt. There was something in Leander's attitude toward his art which troubled her. She could not tell what it was, but in some vague way she felt that it had a relation to his love for her.

The first clear awakening came to her one morning when Leander was at work restudying an old rôle in which he was to appear before the end of the season. It was des Grieux in Puccini's

“Manon Lescaut,” and he had, as he expressed it, become “rusty” in almost every page of it. Helen was astonished to find that he did not sit down at home with the score and read it through carefully before he began work with the accompanist. He told her that such a proceeding would be quite useless. He knew the story and the points of the part. All that he had to do was to set to work to recover the text and the music. He had advanced as far as the second act and was now working on that.

“ ‘Sempre la stessa, sempre la stessa.
Trepida divinamente
Nel l’abbandono ardente,’ ”

Leander sang, and then suddenly interrupted himself to say to the accompanist:

“Confound the fool, why does he run me away down to the bottom of my medium right there, when in another phrase he carries me up to a high A?”

“It is certain that he is a pig,” answered the French accompanist, who had no love for Puccini.

"You should sing only in the 'Manon' of Massenet. But if monsieur will pardon me, he can take the low phrase with almost no voice at all, for who will care, so long as the high A comes out well?"

"Now, Cartier, old man, that's what I call horse sense. You are the best trainer I've had in five years and it's all because you have sense."

"Leander," said Helen in a soft voice, "can you tell me what this Italian text means in this passage for des Grieux?"

"Well, roughly speaking, Helen, it's like this. Des Grieux says, 'Manon, you thoughtlessly betray me. Always the same are you. Divinely trembling in ardent abandonment, good and gentle, how the passion of your embrace thrills me. Then suddenly overwhelmed by the splendor of pleasure, I, your slave and your victim, descend the ladder of infamy. Earth to earth am I, and the pitiable hero of a gambling hell.'"

"I see," said Helen thoughtfully. "Why would it not be better to saturate yourself with

the misery of these thoughts and try to express them in the music than to worry over a high A? ”

Leander looked at her in immeasurable astonishment for a few moments and then burst into a fit of laughter. He looked at Cartier and Cartier smiled politely, as one who was disposed to listen with some respect to the utterance of the wife, but not inclined to offend the tenor.

“ My dear girl,” said Leander, when he had recovered from his laughter, “ I am trying to do just the very thing you have told me to do, but I am doing it as a professional, not as an amateur. If I get the musical phrases right, the expression will take care of itself. That has all been arranged by the composer. But when he writes an ineffective passage for the voice, he spoils his own plan and lessens my chance for success with the scene.”

“ I see,” said Helen; “ go on with your study, Lee; I shan’t interrupt you again.”

There was something curiously dry and hard in the tone in which she spoke, and for a moment it arrested the attention of the tenor, but not for

long. He was soon buried in the score of Puccini again, and she heard him saying to Cartier:

“Now there is fine writing for the voice.”

Then he sang: “*Vitima descendo la scala del l’infamia.*”

“Some sense in that, eh?” he said to Cartier. “Starting with the upper G on ‘vi’ and keeping the voice up to the E on ‘scendo’ and then giving the B flat on ‘la’—why, it sings itself.”

Cartier said to himself that if he had been composing the scene he would not have put the emphasis on “la” but on “sca,” the first syllable of “scala,” but since the tenor had an advantageous placing of his high B flat, all would be well.

When the morning’s work was over Leander went out for his usual four miles of exercise. And for once he and Helen took their luncheon alone in their apartment. When they had finished and were sitting yet at the table, the young wife gazed rather wistfully at her husband and said:

“Lee, I wish you would be more frank with me.”

"What do you mean, little girl?"

"Let me into the inner closet of your artistic life; don't talk to me as if I were an outsider, an amateur incapable of understanding your ideals. I am not an amateur at all. I am your wife, a part of you, a part of your soul, and there is nothing that you can be or feel or think that I cannot understand."

She spoke with a sudden and rising ardor, and Leander gazed upon her with kindling admiration. He rose quickly from his seat, and, striding around to her side, kissed her cheek kindly.

"You dear girl," he said, "of course you are not an amateur."

"Lee," she said gravely, as he resumed his seat, "it isn't a child's bruise to be cured with a kiss."

"Sweetheart, you are making a mountain out of a molehill, aren't you? I don't quite catch the point of your trouble."

"Surely, Lee, you do not expect me to believe that when you are studying a rôle, you think of nothing but the voice effects."

“ Well, it comes to pretty near that. If you were an amateur, as you don’t seem willing to be, I should let you talk a lot of rubbish, but I can’t do that sort of thing with my wife. If I get the vocal effects of this part all properly planned, I shall have another big success with it, and it ought to be bigger than it was when I first sang it, because I know so much more now than I did then.”

Helen remained silent for fully a minute trying to gather the inner significance of these words. It had always been her habit of mind to strive to look clear through anything that was said to her and study it from the rear, as it were. And just now her husband’s words seemed to her to mean so much more than they said.

“ Lee,” she finally said, “ am I to believe that opera singers think only of technical effects? ”

“ That is about what it all comes to, dear. We are all trying to make successes of our rôles, are we not? And the way to do that is to get the big effects over the footlights.”

“ But don’t you think of the glory of the master who wrote the work? ”

“Now, my dear love, can't you see that if I get the voice effects all right in 'Lohengrin' that the part will carry as Wagner intended it to, and that I shall have a big success? It is all right to talk about the composer, but just think of this: if I could not make a big public success in 'Lohengrin,' what good would it be for me to reverence Wagner? Any performance of the opera with a failure in the title rôle would not be to the glory of Wagner, would it? The first thing to look out for is the success of the singer. The composer will come out all right if that is made certain.”

Leander smiled indulgently upon her, as if he were talking to a child and flooding its immature intelligence with new light. And indeed he was doing just that, for Helen was listening to him with a growing, yet wholly indefinable, fear in the most secret recesses of her soul.

“I think I understand,” she said slowly and in a low tone.

Leander rose and went to her side. He patted

her softly on the head and cooed at her with a little sarcasm in his tone :

“ Don’t be an amateur, Helen, if you can help it. Remember that you are the wife of a professional and learn to look at things with professional eyes. And don’t forget that the most important thing in the business for us is my success.”

“ I am trying to come down to that level,” responded Helen.

Leander stared at her for an instant and ceased to caress her. He strode across the room and back.

“ Look here, Helen,” he said ; “ I don’t quite like the way you speak about it. You have no reason for saying that you are coming down to my level.”

“ I said ‘ that ’ level.”

“ Well, it amounts to the same thing. It’s my level, isn’t it? ”

“ You seem to desire that I should think so.”

There was a silence between them for several minutes, while Leander went and gazed out of a

window and seemed to be plunged in annoying thought. He drummed on a pane of glass and whistled softly. Suddenly he stopped and went back to his wife's side.

"Helen," he said; "I am pained; I am disappointed. I am beginning to be afraid that you do not understand."

"Do not understand what?" she asked in a dull tone.

"Me," he replied.

She hesitated a little before she spoke again. "I—I think I understand you. Perhaps it is art that I do not understand."

"Yes, that must be it. Think about it, Helen. You really must get the right idea of the thing, or we shall have disputes about it often, and I'm afraid I'm not very patient. You see, I am an artist. Art is my business, and—and—well, you know you ought to pay attention to what I say about it. Good-by for a while."

He leaned forward and kissed her lightly on the forehead and went out. Mechanically she passed her hand across the spot where he had kissed her

and drew a quick, short breath, as if something had suddenly hurt her. Then she crossed her hands in her lap and gazed before her into the land of thought.

No, she told herself, it was not amazing after all that a singer should bestow so much consideration on the purely mechanical side of his art. Leander was right, he was surely right, in saying that if he planned the vocal effects artistically—that was to say, with a view to their public results, their stimulus to an audience—the great scenes of an opera would carry across the footlights and the composer's aims would be achieved.

But—oh, she could not bear the notion that Leander was doing it all without any thought for anything save his own public success. It was too hard to believe that, but she could not escape the conviction that there was nothing more. It was all for personal glory, for self, self, self!

When she had confessed that to her own innermost soul, she sprang up from her chair and ran across the room aimlessly, as if seeking some way

of escape from the dark thing which was standing so menacingly in front of her.

Self! The glory and the worship of self! His personal success the only thing to be sought; his instructions to be her gospel of art; and—he whimpered that she misunderstood him! Great Heaven! The trouble was that she understood too much. “Misunderstood!” The pitiful cry of the weak man. She knew that, even she, for she had seen weak people in her life. And it was the weakness of selfishness.

And what did it all signify for her? That he wished her to join the sheeplike herd of his adulators, to lie at his feet and adore his majesty, to make him an idol and offer him a worship which he would accept as his just due? No, it could not mean so much as that. Her dreams of a great and perfect love in the union of two souls made not of the common order could not fall to such a miserable wreck as that. Leander was right. She misunderstood him. She must learn to regard it all from his point of view,—not so poetic as hers, perhaps, but true and therefore

nearer to the ideal. Leander loved art and her more than himself, of course.

And then she sank into a chair, buried her face in her hands, and shook with a furious storm of weeping.

CHAPTER VIII

NOT much later in the same week Philip Studley was accosted by Webster, as the two walked slowly out of a concert hall, where they had been painfully listening to the demonstration of the lamentable incapacity of a pianist recently arrived after a sensationally successful tour of Australia.

“Let us go and smoke a strong cigar and get the taste of it out of our mouths,” said Webster.

“Thanks,” replied Philip with a smile, “if you’ll take the qualification off the cigar I’ll go with pleasure.”

“Smoke a cigarette, if you like, my child.”

And so they went together to a certain educational chop house where learned Thebans of the theater and the lyric hall sometimes assemble to talk of their great professions. Their conversation dwelt not at all on the poor pianist whom they had just heard. They were only too glad

to forget her. They soon drifted into opera, for through the half-curtained window they could see the ugly walls of the yellow temple of lyric art. Philip's youthful enthusiasms interested and touched the "General." He listened reflectively while the younger critic aired some of his views about the distinguished artists who excited audiences in the theater across the street. How sad it all seemed to the elder man that the whole thing should be so hollow. What a pity that a fresh and virile young soul should waste its splendor on such worthless things. He shook his head slowly till Philip asked him why he was doing it.

"Well," said the General, "I hate to destroy illusions, but these so-called artists are pretty much all alike."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Philip, who had for some time been convinced that Webster was soured by his own want of recognition in foreign musical centers. Certain Berlin papers, for example, had referred contemptuously to what they called the "dilettante criticism" of Amer-

ica, and this had caused the General to go out into a corridor of the opera house and lash himself into a fury. Philip recalled that and similar incidents and he feared that Webster's dicta were not always free from bias.

"Well," said the General, "you keep yourself unspotted from the world, my son. You have done so without difficulty so far, and you will have to do so now, even if it is not so easy. I know that you are a friend of Baroni's wife and it is going to be hard for you to avoid being drawn into the opera crowd. But keep away from them as much as you can. They are no better than a lot of cattle."

"You don't mean that," replied Philip, smiling.

"Don't I?" demanded Webster somewhat warmly; "wait and see. The opera singer is first, last, and all the time for himself. His own public success and the increase of his salary are his objects in life."

"Don't you think Baroni is a real artist?"

"As real as any of them. Baroni values Gounod, for example, just as far as Gounod fits

Baroni and helps him to become famous, and not one bit further. He studies his rôles earnestly—in order to make as big a success as possible for Baroni. That's all he thinks about. Don't delude yourself into the belief that he or any of the rest of them care anything for the great art of music. Did you ever see Baroni sit through a Brahms symphony or a concert of the Kneisel Quartet?"

Philip started. He certainly never had seen the tenor at a Kneisel concert; but—yes—he remembered now he had once discovered him in a box at a Philharmonic, and so he told Webster.

"Who was the soloist at that concert?" asked the Old Man.

Philip searched his memory.

"Freiburg, the German tenor," he answered.

"Exactly; the other tenor!" exclaimed the General sardonically. And Philip understood. He was silent for a few moments, and then he said to Webster:

"I have already become acquainted through them with one of the sopranos of the company—Mlle. Bosanska."

Webster sat bolt upright in his chair and laid a firm hand on the shoulder of his young confrère.

"My boy," he said, "shun the women as you would the devil. So far as we of the critical fraternity are concerned every one of them is a vampire—a rag, and a bone, and a hank of hair—and she never can understand."

"They cannot all be like that," answered Philip.

"Those who are not will none the less endeavor to make a fool of you. Remember that no one in the musical profession has any other use for you than one, namely, to get you to write praise in your paper."

Philip smiled again. He hoped he would not be so soured when he had spent twenty-five years in the business of writing music criticism. At present he felt very human and he believed that musicians were just as human as himself. He had faith in the best of them. He was willing to believe that the little ones were all self-seekers, and that they had no true artistic ideals, but he was sure that the great masters and mistresses of

art who made Siegfried and Tristan and Brünnhilde and Isolde and Armide and Orfeo live on the mimic stage were reverent worshipers before the altar of æsthetic beauty. So he smiled somewhat indulgently as he rose and looked at his watch. Webster read his thoughts and sighed. He had been through it all, and he knew.

“ I’m sorry,” Philip said; “ but I’ve promised to drop in at Mrs. Manners’ at home.”

“ Oh, Heaven help us! ” exclaimed the General. “ You too, Brutus! Can’t you keep away? That woman is the demon *ex machina* of the musical world. If you go to her house, you’ll meet every professional musician whom you do not wish to meet, especially the vampires.”

“ The vampires? ”

“ Yes, of course. Women like Mrs. Manners receive them in their homes, these creatures, little better than the shadows who prowl the great white way at night. They invite them to luncheon and dinner and get decent women to come and be introduced to them and all because they are opera singers. If the same women were engaged

in any other line of business, Mrs. Manners and her kind would draw their skirts together when passing them for fear of getting soiled."

Webster panted in his indignation and strode away, shaking his head mournfully, as one who sees his friend taking a glass more than is good for him. And Philip went to Mrs. Manners' house. He had never known her intimately, but in the present season he had met her often at rehearsals and in the concert hall and she had seemed to make a point of pushing the acquaintance. She was always at home on Thursday afternoons, she had told him, and he had promised to go. He had neglected to do so, and had been duly upbraided and had neglected some more and been upbraided some more till now he felt that it would be altogether too rude to delay the matter any longer. So with the melancholy words of the General still lingering in his ears, he entered Mrs. Manners' drawing-room.

You climbed a flight of rather chillingly important stairs to reach this drawing-room and all the way up a grim marble statue of Verdi, ex-

ecuted by a German who adored Brückner, glared down upon you from an icy niche in a white wall. But when you had accomplished the ascent, you found yourself in a curious labyrinth of rooms, all more than half dark, and with the darkness accentuated by tiny rose-shaded Eastern lamps burning in the most unexpected places and casting the most distracting shadows. You also became conscious of an olfactory irritation, slight, but none the less perceptible, caused by thin, acrid smoke issuing from the tops of these same lamps. Incense of some sort or other it was, and you easily persuaded yourself that Mrs. Manners burned it before her musical gods who came to visit her on her at home days.

Three rooms ranged through the floor, but the cunning distribution of doors and mirrors produced an illusion of innumerable apartments opening into ever further and further remote regions. And heavy portières, more little lamps, and myriads more of distracting shadows heightened the effect. Furthermore you could not discern the lineaments of any one seated in the drawing-room,

which was really the second of the three, for the lights and shadows made sight most uncertain. So that when you suddenly heard the thin voice of Mrs. Manners cutting the air close to your ear and looked around to discover that she was not what you had just taken for another shadow, you experienced a delightful little shock, which was precisely what she wished you to experience. Philip went through it all, and was somewhat amused when he heard her saying to his left ear:

“Mr. Studley, this is just too sweet of you. Come right over here and be introduced to the greatest woman in the world.”

He was literally dragged toward a broad heavy shadow, which presently turned out to be a sofa, and out of this wide area of gloom issued a liquid voice, which said:

“But it is not necessary to present Mr. Studley; he and I are already acquainted.”

Philip had not the faintest idea who was speaking, but he composedly sat down beside the upright part of the shadow, which presently turned its head so as to permit one of the little lamps

to cast a dim ray upon it, and he perceived that he was gazing into the green eyes of Nagy Bosanska. And for the moment, with the uncertain light of the Oriental lamp wavering in their luminous depths, they made him think of cruel and treacherous green waters rushing over quicksands.

"I am sure you remember that we met Mrs. Baroni, you and I, at the same time, at a rehearsal months ago," she said in her strangely sensuous voice.

"Mrs. Baroni and I made your acquaintance. She and I are old friends. Indeed I have known her even longer than he has."

"She has the grand air," said Nagy musingly, as she let her sloe-black lashes mask her eyes for a moment; "and Baroni—he has no air at all. He is a great baby. I wonder why she took him. But one cannot understand love. It is royal, a master, not to be questioned—is it not so?"

And the sloe-black lashes rose slowly, showing the green depths aflame with baleful fires. For a moment some strange thing stirred far down in the secret lair of Philip's soul, something he had

never felt before, something that burned within him like an inward blush and at the same moment stung like the sudden lash of a whip. He wrenched his eyes away from those of the woman with an effort and gripped himself well before he answered:

“ I am not able to qualify as an expert, mademoiselle. I have had no experience.”

Nagy Bosanska's eyes half closed again and she gave a little faint sigh.

“ No experience! You have not yet lived; you are still asleep in the cradle of life. When will you wake up, I wonder? ”

Philip did not answer; he merely smiled.

“ Ah, my friend,” said Nagy, leaning forward till her face was close to his and he could feel the faint sensuous warmth of her breath upon his cheek, “ you smile in your sleep, but you will weep when you are awakened. I, Nagy Bosanska, tell you this, and it is true.”

And again Philip smiled, for he remembered what Baroni had told him; she was a gipsy and she had to play up to the rôle. But nevertheless

there was something about the woman that troubled him. He had always been free from the seduction of the senses. Women had always appealed to him with potent spell, but his high idealism had kept him clean. Nagy Bosanska, however, had moved something within him that was beyond his understanding.

And while he was still wondering he heard Mrs. Manners at the entrance to the room exclaiming:

"I knew you would take pity on us some day, and to think that it should be this, of all days!"

A moment later she came up to Nagy and Philip, triumphantly leading Baroni. The tenor and the newspaper man shook hands rather formally, and the latter said:

"I had the pleasure of seeing your wife at home not long ago."

"Yes, I've heard of your being there and I'm sorry to have missed you."

Nagy looked from one to the other with a wicked little gleam in her wonderful eyes. Life for her was a perpetual turmoil of tangled sex

relations, and she suspected at once that the critic and the tenor's wife—what? She did not know, but she had to suspect because an inscrutable Providence had created her that way. She never ended with mere suspicion, for with her certain knowledge was bound to come. She had a profound insight into human nature, that insight which has so often enabled her race to look into the faces of men and women and so measure their characters as to make prophecies not far amiss. Sooner or later she was sure to know Philip's real feelings for Helen, and to respect him for them. But just now she counted it her time to watch. So she said little, but she listened, and meanwhile she was deeply considering Baroni.

She was certain—she did not suspect—that life was to him yet an uncut volume. He had looked at the attractive binding and had peeped at the title page. Yes, he had even glanced at the preface. Some day he would begin to cut the leaves and read. Then he would discover himself and—yes—he might be very well worth while. But would the patrician wife ever find that

out? Pah! How could she, that puritanical American woman? What a pity he had not loved her—Nagy! What a revelation of life she would have made him. But—would he really be worth while?

“What? Oh, I suppose so,” she said, answering at random a remark of Mrs. Manners. “I must go on—that is what you say here, isn’t it? Will you ride up with me in my car, Baroni?”

Philip had just invited the tenor to go to his club with him, and Baroni had not answered. Now the tenor smiled at him apologetically and said to Nagy:

“I suppose if I decline the first invitation you have ever given me, you’ll spoil our next scene together.”

And so Nagy carried him off in her triumphal chariot.

CHAPTER IX

“**S**HALL I take you home?” asked Nagy.

“Um-m-m—well, no, I don’t think I shall go just yet. I want to stop at the——”

Nagy interrupted him with a ripple of laughter. The laugh of Nagy Bosanska was more wonderful than many fountains. Sometimes it showered flashing streams of silvery staccati, and then it was as if one heard a scale of detached notes on a flute. Sometimes it flowed downward in a swift chromatic torrent, like a scale of semitones in the high positions of the A string of a 'cello. And if ten other descriptions of it were written, no one would have more than a shadow of knowledge, for it was ever different. This time Nagy rippled and that ripple was like the Waldweben in “Siegfried”—or the bubbling of water on the lips of a drowning man. One could never be perfectly certain whether it was tragedy or comedy with

Nagy. Upon Leander all was quite lost. Nothing had any special significance to him. He was so utterly American. He had no more imagination than a stock broker. And yet there was something in him, something which had never become an active force. And doubtless it was this which caused the wise Nagy to say that he was a great baby and was not yet awake. So when she had interrupted him with her incomprehensible laughter, she said:

“ You don’t want to go home, and the first year of your married bliss is not yet finished ! ”

“ Oh, cut that out, Nagy. You know nothing about it and it is not for you to discuss.”

“ You are right, my friend,” she said with a sudden and wonderful softness in her voice. “ She is very beautiful and you are a very happy man.”

Leander swallowed the words with difficulty. Of course Helen was very beautiful, but he did not relish hearing Nagy comment upon her. However, he answered heartily:

“ Now you’re talking sense, Nagy.”

“Yes, sometimes I feel quite sensible and it interests me. I am always ravished with novelty. But after all, since you are not in a hurry to go home and you do not know just where else to go, why do you not come and pass a few minutes at my little retreat? It is most quiet there and the old Melanie, my companion, will be overjoyed. She is of your adorers.”

Entrancing, inexhaustible Nagy! There was in this speech a naïveté, a childish simplicity which came as balm to the inflamed sensibilities of the tenor. He saw himself relaxing in body and spirit in the bower of this adorable exotic. He leaped instinctively to the conclusion that it would be restful there. How restful Nagy herself was at this instant; how soft, how gentle, how soothing. He hesitated a moment, drew a quick breath, and said:

“Can’t say I’m eager about your companion, Nagy; but it does sound inviting.”

And so he went. He had begun to have a lively curiosity about Nagy. Hitherto she had been to him only a brilliant apparition of the

theater and he had delighted in singing with her because her style was so aflame with dramatic modulations, so elastic, so subtle, and so magnetic that she helped him to make successes. He had sometimes been a little jealous of her effect on audiences, but not for long. He realized that she was a splendid foil for him and that her methods made his own stand out more clearly. But now he was slowly developing an interest in the personality of the woman. He had never before been in Nagy's apartment and he walked around, studying it, while Nagy threw off her wraps and sank into a deep chair, from which she regarded him with an expression for her unusually thoughtful.

You might have known Nagy a lifetime and never have guessed how she would furnish a dwelling. Her flat was one of those large, airy, light ones which exist in some parts of New York. Nagy did not love too much light and she had draped her windows with heavy curtains of a rich ruby red, too dark and opulent in tone to be aggressive. The walls of the drawing-room were

covered with a figured brocade of the same tint as that of the curtains. The floor was in dark wood and the rugs were all in deep velvety shades. There were few pictures—a copy of Franz Hals' "Hille Robbe," with the wicked owl perched upon her shoulder, an etching after Lucas van Leyden's "Eulenspiegel," and a remarkably well-executed copy of Couture's "Les Romains de la Décadence," small, but faithful in spirit and color. These were the chief pieces. There were some smaller things, photographs and one or two prints, including a sepia view of the interior of the Church of Our Lady at Treves. It was a strange and incongruous mixture, like Nagy herself. There were no flowers in the room. Nagy always threw them away as fast as she received them. But on a table in a corner stood a Hungarian cembalon. Mme. Melanie could have told Leander that when Nagy was in a harsh mood she could hammer out the most blood-curdling music from the jangling wires.

"Well, my friend," said Nagy, "how do you like it?"

“It’s fine,” answered Leander; “so restful and quiet.”

And he sank down into a chair and sighed.

“Cigarette?” murmured Nagy, holding out her little gold case.

Leander took one. Nagy lighted her own and then leaned forward to let him take a light from it while she still held it in her lips. The tenor accepted the Promethean gift, and they both smiled with a touch of amusement as they leaned back after the feat had been accomplished.

“Funny you and I have never been better acquainted, Nagy,” said Leander; “for although we talk familiarly and treat one another with the imitation of intimacy that one finds in an opera house, we don’t know one another particularly well, do we?”

“Speak for yourself, Baroni. I know both you and me. You will perhaps one day know me, but you will never know me.”

“Do you mean to say that you think I don’t know myself now?”

"Not the least little bit in the world, my dear boy."

"Well, how am I going to become acquainted?" asked Leander with an indulgent smile.

"Through—love," slowly answered Nagy.

Leander was silent, and presently Nagy continued:

"But it is very well; you have begun rightly. You have found the beautiful, proud woman, made her your wife, and she will educate you in love, and thus you will come to be as wise as a god."

"Yes, I see," commented Leander as he slowly blew thin smoke from his lips. He fell into a silence. He forgot that he was in Nagy's presence. His mind was retracing certain steps in the past and finding them not what he now wished that they had been. And Nagy smoked her cigarette, said no word, and watched him through the fringes of her eyes. She was beginning to believe that he might be worth while. And she could

not drive out of her mind a suspicion that his senses and his soul had neither one been yet touched by the woman whom he had married. She was certain that he had something worth stirring. She would interest herself by indulging in experiment. She glided over to the piano which stood in one corner of the room, and before Leander was aware that she had seated herself she began to play a strange, weird Oriental melody such as he had never heard. He turned and listened attentively, and suddenly she modulated and swept into the accompaniment of a song.

“‘Guschi ki behakk bazi büwed der herne dschai,
Belli jari, belli dost jari dschani men wai.’”

And there was not a little more of the queer sliding melody of melting intervals and oily scales. Leander, understanding nothing yet, felt strange waves running through all his sense. It was as if he had suddenly been thrust into the depths of a fragrant tropical garden. He drew a quick breath, looked swiftly at Nagy, and said in a strained tone:

“For Heaven’s sake, Nagy, what is that, and what does it mean?”

“Oh, it is a Persian folk song,” she answered lightly. Then flashing into a half-serious manner, she added: “As for the meaning, it is in effect this: ‘I am singing here alone. Hear me and do not turn away, beloved soul.’”

Leander smiled one of his familiar indulgent smiles. The tension which had temporarily come upon him was relieved and he relaxed all over inside and out.

“Always love songs, aren’t they, Nagy? I suppose you never sing a song with a moral to it, or a purely fantastic song, eh? I sometimes believe that you never think of anything but love. You appear to have an idea that that is life.”

“You are mistaken, my friend. I do not think about it always. But I live for it always. It is life, or at any rate it is the only thing worth living for. It is the only power that can raise life above the level of the grimy earth and make it truly great. But in this sordid America no one is great. You are a nation of hucksters. You see nothing,

you know nothing, you feel nothing. You have two objects in existence, the pocket and the stomach. The one is for the other. The pocket—that is for money. The money is to buy things for the stomach, things to eat and to drink. Also to go to the things for the stomach. You become rich. What do you do? You buy an automobile. Do you ride in it through dream-haunted valleys and heaven-storming mountains, that you may feed great your souls upon the spirit of the world? No, you go as fast as the car can fly to some famous place for getting things for the stomach. You eat, you drink, and your soul becomes as the soul of a pig. That is your pleasure. The next day you hasten downtown to get more dollars to buy more things to eat and drink. And that is what you fancy is life, for it is your life. But you are all dead, dumb, soulless. You know nothing, you see nothing. This beautiful world, that was made to glorify us, is lost, wasted on you. Everything that is great and noble is crushed here into the mire. Where are your poets, your painters, your sculptors, your great

masters of music? Parrots, taught in Europe to repeat our alphabets! Children, who prattle by rote! Pah! Fools! And what are your women? Sheep, bleating, idle sheep. They are emancipated women of the harem, women who have no souls. Bon Dieu! What a nation! The men hagglers for more dollars and the women overdressed geese, waiting always to be fed. Not one beautiful thought in their lazy minds! And then you smile like a fool at me and say that I think always of love. Of what shall a real woman think, you wooden image? Do you believe that I, Nagy Bosanska, an eternal spirit, a living, burning, throbbing soul, that shakes the very sky above me, that I shall be a thing of the pocket and the stomach, like an American odalisque? No, I live, I *am*! I vibrate with the eternal fires! I am an immortal poem, a deathless song! I am all that was and all that shall be. I am the holy temple of celestial passion. The riddle of life is open to me. I am as the very gods. But you—pish! Man, you are a marionette.”

And Nagy, panting, strode across the room

and flung herself upon the keyboard of the piano in a wild torrent of exotic harmonies above which she suddenly burst once more into song:

“‘As ich wolt gehat adus wus ich mein
Wolt ich doch gliklich gewein;
Mir thut doch mein harz oisgehn
Wen ich thu dichdersehen.’”

As the last line of the quaint Jewish song died slowly away, Nagy turned swiftly and buried her face in her hands, while her exquisite frame shook with a thunderstorm of weeping.

“Now what on earth is the matter with you, Nagy?” asked Leander, going over and standing beside her in a rather uncertain attitude.

“It is nothing,” she sobbed; “you must not give to me any attention. It will pass. No one can help me. I think no one understands me. Do you know how dreadful that is?”

Leander did not answer immediately, and she furtively watched his face from beneath her drooping lashes. Presently the tenor walked away from her and sank again into a deep chair. He seemed to forget that Nagy was in the room

and lost himself in a profound reflection. Nagy went and stood beside him. She looked down on him with an inscrutable expression. There was in it tenderness, amusement, contempt, and yearning. Softly, very softly she laid a hand upon his splendid bright hair, and, as he did not move, she stroked the silky locks caressingly, as a mother might stroke those of her child.

"Yes," she said; "it is certain that I am stupid. I forgot. You do not have to be misunderstood. You have your beautiful wife who sees down into the very shrine of your being and understands all of your moods, your hopes, your fears, your delicate artistic perceptions, your music soul. Yes, that is very wonderful. It is always more wonderful for a man than it is for a woman. A woman does not expect to be understood by a man; it is impossible. But a woman can understand the man she loves. He has no secrets from her. His soul is her daily scripture. She reads it, she drinks it in with every thought. It is her life study. It becomes her soul. Ah, that is the glory of love."

Leander sprang up from the chair, throwing her hand rudely from his hair.

"Nagy, I will not listen," he said; "be quiet."

"What have I done? Is it that I have been familiar with the sacredness of your love? But you will forgive me for that, for I am only your friend, your friend, who is thinking of your happiness, Baroni."

Again he was silent, and Nagy ventured to take his hand in hers.

"Or shall I dare," she continued, "to fear that it is not perfect, and that the stately queen does not see all the way into the soul of the great artist?"

"Nagy, be silent," said Leander sternly. "You must not dare to question me about my wife."

"It is true. I am very sorry. Ah, one should not expect poetic insight from an American woman. I am sorry. But fear nothing. I shall bury this in my heart, Baroni. I shall not speak of it. It shall be our own little secret, which we

shall not breathe even to each other. But when you are weary and sad and need to be understood, you will remember that Nagy Bosanska is your friend, will you not? And she has the eternal woman soul, the soul of the world."

She leaned against him and he felt the firm round curves of her beautiful body swelling through the slight silken gown, and the dainty perfume which always exhaled from her rose to his nostrils like an incense. He smiled down upon her, and his head bent slowly as if drawn by an irresistible force. She lifted her voluptuous red lips, which were slightly parted so that her quick breathing could almost be seen. Leander's eyes darkened with a look of the wild beast that dwells in every man, and he gripped her with his arm. But the woman, wise as a serpent, saw that the hour had not yet come. She had touched only the outer skin of his grosser sense. At the very instant when it seemed as if their lips must melt together in a kiss, she drew back swiftly, pressed a hand over her heart in an expressive gesture, and said in a barely audible voice:

"You will come to see me again—when the world seems dull to you—and I shall try to make you forget, shall I not?"

Leander shook himself as if he found dust upon his garments. Forget? That was the one thing he must not do. He must remember every minute that he was the husband of a good and true woman, who unfortunately cherished utterly false ideals about his profession.

"No—yes—no; I suppose so. It's getting toward dinner time, Nagy, and I must be getting home."

"Home! Yes, that is the right place for you, Baroni. But I shall see you here again some time. I am sure of it."

She gave him her hand, which he kissed quite formally, and he departed. As soon as he was gone, she called her companion.

"Melanie," she said; "I shall dine out. You can do as you please or go to the devil. Telephone at once to Comparelli that I shall expect him here in half an hour to take me to dinner."

And when Melanie had gone to obey the com-

mands Nagy remained standing thoughtfully beside the piano and singing in an undertone:

“ ‘ Si tu ne m’aimes pas, je t’aime;
Si je t’aime, prends garde a toi.’ ”

Wise, far-seeing Nagy! But she did not see to the borders of all things.

CHAPTER X

THE spell of Nagy had fallen upon the tenor, and he knew it not. He believed that he had walked out of its magic circle when he had left her apartment. And it was creeping behind him like his own shadow. And there was another man upon whom it had fallen, a man whom Nagy herself had forgotten when her eyes were drawn to the tenor, but whom she would presently remember.

* * * * *

Philip Studley was uneasy in his mind. He strode up and down his room and smoked viciously. He was dissatisfied with himself, for suddenly he realized that he had conceived a singularly active curiosity about a prima donna. He had fallen to trying to analyze Nagy Bosanska and had discovered that his methods were inadequate. There was more material for analysis than he knew how to handle. He turned his examina-

tion inward. He became introspective and then he was quite as much in the dark as he was before. He found himself crowded with conflicting feelings. He knew that it was all wrong for him to think about a prima donna at all. That conviction stood out with perfect distinctness. But right beside it stood another, namely that he desired to think about her very much.

Then he pondered on the wise words of Webster. How much did the General really know? All the "boys" said that Webster never went near a woman. It was whispered that a very beautiful and interesting prima donna had once followed him halfway across Europe only to be compelled in the end to say to him, "You're a Parsifal." Philip was well aware that he himself was no Parsifal, but neither was he a Klingsor.

Why could he not interest himself in the exciting phenomenon called Nagy Bosanska without getting into difficulties? Besides, had he any reason to flatter himself that the prima donna would be especially interested in him? Oh, yes, he was a critic, to be sure, and the General had

declared that so far as the guild was concerned all the prima donnas were vampires. But Philip was morally certain that no vampire could get anything from him. He was sure that he was unapproachable. His three-years' experience had seemed so large to him! Anyhow, he decided that he would go down to the opera house and listen to some of a rehearsal of "Manon Lescaut." It was not at all likely that she would be there, of course, as she was not in the cast of Puccini's opera. And so he walked into the almost impenetrable gloom of the auditorium and sat down in a quiet corner.

The usual lot was there, with Mrs. Harley Manners in the foreground. The rehearsal was more uninteresting than such things commonly were, for the reason that none of the singers was trying to do anything more than indicate the music, and the conductor, Comparelli, was in a bad humor; which caused him to stop the orchestra every two or three minutes and deliver an angry lecture in swift Italian. There was no reason—except Comparelli—why Nagy Bosanska should

have been present at this rehearsal, and even Comparelli was no longer a strong reason. Her friendship with him was overripe. His conceit had wearied her. She would soon cast him off, that was certain.

She had been swept off her feet at first by his masterful conducting. She had once more dreamed her beautiful dream, that she had found a man who would fill her life. But this was what Nagy was always seeking and had never found. She drained the wine from ordinary souls in a few draughts, and went onward, ever onward, consumed by a fierce thirst. No man who walked upon life's common levels could be her mate. But she herself was as boundless as the sea and as inexhasutible as space. She was a measureless giver and men fought for her gifts, but usually in vain. She gave only where she fancied she saw her happiness, and she was still wandering in pursuit of her vision.

However, she was in the theater, and her keen eyes discovered the young man sitting in his quiet corner. Presently she glided noiselessly into a

seat behind him and when the first act was ended leaned forward and breathed upon his cheek. There was something sinister in that breathing of Nagy Bosanska. A score of women might let a man feel their breath on his face without stirring his pulse. But when Nagy did that the primal man of Rodin rose up in pride and force. It felt like a voluptuous caress. The actual touch of the woman's lips could not have done more, and, being less subtle, might have done less. Philip was about to turn, when she murmured with her mouth close to his ear:

"Since I first met you I have thought sometimes that I was sorry that I had."

"Really?" said Philip, freed at once from the strange influence of that breathed caress; "I am sure I know of no reason why you should think of the matter at all."

"Well, I have found reasons."

"Perhaps," said Philip, politely responding to her plain indication that she wished to be asked, "you would not mind telling me one of them."

"Since I met you I have much wished to be friends with you."

"And is that a reason for wishing that you had not met me?"

"Yes, for if I try to be friends with you, you will believe it is because I wish you to write flattery of me in your paper."

"And you, of course, wish to stand entirely on your merits."

"Of a certainty. Would not you, if you were a singer?"

"Oh, I'm not so sure. I've been told that prima donnas desire unending praise. They think it fools the public; but it does not."

"I do not fool the public; I conquer it. If my best is not good enough, I make it better. Is not that what I should do?"

"Yes, but that is not the usual course."

"Neither am I usual; I am Nagy Bosanska. And yet I cannot make you believe in me."

She bowed her head so that stray tendrils of her hair brushed his cheek and her voice sank into a deep musical murmur. Then she raised

her head again and looked deep into his eyes and his eyes turned not away. Some strange swift current passed from one to the other. Philip trembled in his chair. The magic spell of Nagy Bosanska was upon him. And still they stared into one another's eyes, like Tristan and Isolde in the first act. Presently Philip, hardly knowing his own voice, so tense and low was it, heard himself saying to her:

"It is for you to make me believe in you—if you think it worth while."

"If," she whispered, "you will believe in me in your heart of heart I shall not care what you write about me. It is your faith I crave."

The word "write" restored Philip temporarily to his senses.

"My dear Mlle. Bosanska," he said, "if I condemned your Tosca you would regard me as your enemy."

For answer she gazed steadily into his eyes once more and then whispered:

"To-morrow evening I shall be at home—alone. Come and let me try to convince you."

As she rose to depart, Philip shook his head with a smiling negative and she smiled back a contradiction. And at half-past eight the following evening, Philip, finding that after all there was neither opera nor concert demanding his attention, thought he might as well be convinced, if only for the satisfaction of discomfiting Webster, and he walked calmly into Nagy's parlor. He found the room mystic, with a delicious half-gloom, in the midst of which he saw Nagy, a wonderful vision.

Her hair, which was of the softest and most velvety black, was coiled in something like a Grecian knot and hung low upon her neck, while in front it swept in two seductive curves away from her broad white forehead. The robe, which covered, but did not wholly conceal, her adorable body, was cut rather low around the neck, so that the firm lines of her splendid throat and the round breast partly revealed themselves and the elbow sleeves permitted a ravishing display of her marvelously beautiful forearms.

Philip was no expert in the garments of women,

but he was sure that the soft clinging stuff which floated around Nagy must have come out of the East. It had a sensuous languor that breathed Oriental luxury. When Nagy moved it twined around her caressingly and threw the lines of her form into clear relief. And she seemed so charmingly unconscious that she was like an odalisque or an houri of the Turkish paradise. She undulated toward him with a strange inscrutable smile upon her ripe lips. She held out her hand and let her rosy fingers caress his for a moment.

"I dreamed that you would come," she murmured in her low register.

"I knew I would," he answered, astonished to hear his own voice sound a wooing note.

They stood gazing at each other till suddenly Nagy laughed a little forced laugh and said:

"How foolish we look standing without a word in the middle of the room. Come and sit by me on the sofa and tell me things."

She drew him to the sofa and sank into its embrace. Philip felt once more that singular indefinable influence which he had noted when he sat

beside her at Mrs. Manners', but he could not now even make an attempt to shake it off.

"I think I cannot tell you anything," he said presently; "you seem to me to know everything already."

"Peste! I am not so old as that, my friend."

"No, not old; young. It is the wisdom of eternal youth."

She did not answer, but smiled a faint, half-hidden smile and looked at him with a sweet gentleness in her eloquent eyes. For some time after that their conversation was not rapid. It was composed chiefly of a richly instrumented silence with occasional flashes of recitative. In the intervals of silence Nagy looked down at the floor. If he spoke she looked up into his eyes. The young man's pulse fluttered as a bird sometimes does at the beginning of the serpent's charming. Suddenly Nagy rose and walked across the room rapidly. Then she just as suddenly sat down in a large chair far away from him. She said nothing and he said nothing; but he saw her bosom rising and falling rapidly and he noticed that she

clenched her hands. His impulse to rush across the room and seize her in his arms must have betrayed itself in his face, for she rose from the chair as swiftly as she had dropped into it, and, throwing her hands out in front of her, exclaimed:

“Sit still! I am going to sing for you.”

She went over to the piano and seated herself. Her hands stroked the keys caressingly and the strings sang flute-like, subdued tones.

“No opera,” she murmured; “something altogether different, something quite for—you.”

The inflection on the last word was like a kiss. Then she began to sing, first a quaint acrid piercing song of the Greek isles with pungent, melodic surprises in its flattened second and its augmented fifth. Hardly was Philip’s ear filled with the keen taste of this when she glided into a Turkish love song, with a spineless tune and harmonies startlingly suggestive of a depraved soul. Nagy sang in tones which Philip had never before heard in her voice, low, mellow, cooing notes, like those of the dove in the mating season. But still

the young man was able to contemplate the singing with his mind, although his soul confessed the marvelous witchery of the tones. Nagy seemed instinctively to realize that her songs were not conquering him. With a sudden modulation she slipped into the first words of "Wie bist du meine Königin." If Philip had one musical weak spot, it was for the songs of Brahms. Nagy watched him narrowly through her eyelids and saw that he was now really moved. So she sang on through "Liebestreu," "Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer," "Von ewiger Liebe," and "Wie Melodien." It was a matchless exposition of the innermost soul of the self-contained German master. How this wild, untrammelled, undisciplined creature, with her imperfect training and her depreciating operatic experiences, ever acquired such a noble and potent art is something that remained forever one of the mysteries of Philip's life. He rose from the sofa slowly and reluctantly, as if drawn by some supernatural power against which his weakening will battled in vain. He drew near to her and stood beside her, breath-

ing quickly. She gave him a quick, short glance, and he saw that there were tears in her eyes. Suddenly she rose and laid her hands upon his shoulders:

“ Do you believe in me now? ”

“ Yes,” he answered in a choked voice.

Both were silent. They stood straining their looks to read each other's heart. Philip's senses swam with deep, elemental throbs of a passion such as he had never dreamed. His limbs trembled and his sight grew dim. Nagy was moved. This beautiful, fresh, youthful emotion, so pure in its naïveté, so rich and splendid in its self-surrender, roused to a pulsating response all that was most generous in her strange nature. Perhaps this would be for life. She leaned forward slowly, tenderly, till she lay caressingly against his breast. He made one last feeble effort to free himself. She felt the movement and looked up into his eyes and he was sure that he saw the glisten of tears. A mighty thrill swept through him. Could it be true that this marvelous creature loved him? He cast away all thought. He

suddenly wrapped her in his arms and flung his lips upon hers.

* * * * *

The morning light had a lurid tint to the eyes of Philip. He even cowered under it as if shrinking from an impending blow. A lassitude, such as he had never before known, lay upon his mind. He felt only the chill glare of the dull, cold light and a faint trembling in his limbs. He asked himself nothing. The mental numbness resolved itself into a steady stare at the thin line of white between the portières at the window. Real consciousness returned to him only when he heard as from a distance the voice of Nagy.

“It is growing late. There is coffee in the next room when you are ready.”

He did not see her. He did not try. He shivered as he recalled the previous evening. He rose slowly and heavily and in half an hour passed into the adjoining chamber, where he found her sitting at the little table, looking divinely lovely and exquisitely submissive. She turned a pleading pair of eyes upon him and lifted her red

mouth. He bent down and kissed her and then sighed deeply as he seated himself opposite her.

"Why do you sigh, my friend?" she asked.

"What shall I do next?" he responded.

"Shall I resign?"

"Resign what?"

"My post as music critic?"

"But for what should you do this?"

"Because I love you," he answered with simple earnestness. "I cannot write honestly about you, can I?"

Nagy gave him one of her long melting looks from half-closed eyes.

"What a dear innocent child it is! Do you think, Philip, that I would care for you if you were not honest?"

"It is not you, but myself, that I cannot trust."

"How is that?"

"Everything you do will be beautiful to me. I shall adore you if you sing out of tune."

"I never sing out of tune."

There was a note of challenge in the declaration, but the infatuated young man did not hear it.

"No," he continued; "but you may do something which ought to seem wrong to me, and it will not."

"Come, then," she said, passing around the table and twining her arms about his neck. "It shall be a battle between us. You shall swear to write always the truth about me, and I—I shall try always to make you blind with love."

Philip sighed again, and Nagy broke into a low ripple of laughter.

"Silly boy!" she said; "it shall be nothing of that kind. It shall be something much better. When I am on the stage, I shall be for you Mlle. Bosanska, prima donna assoluta. You shall study me as a curiosity of art and write about me as something that dwells behind footlights and not in your world. And then you shall come to me and I shall be just a woman—who loves you."

And that was the beginning of their impossible compact.

CHAPTER XI

IT was a bright, sharp morning, with almost no wind. The frost lay white upon the shrunken grasses of the park lawns, and Helen strode rapidly along the walk gazing upon the field of diamonds with unobservant eye. Her mind was absorbed in her own affairs. More than one man passing on horseback or in a vehicle turned his head to drink in the beautiful vision. With her perfectly shaped head bowed, and her long soft lashes falling upon her rosy cheeks, her lips parted, and her hair shining in the sunlight, Helen was a ravishing figure. Every line of her expressed high-bred character and intellect. But a single examination of her face sufficed to convince one that she was a sensitive human instrument with infinite vibrations. It was in the line of her upper lip that much was revealed. The two little points under the nostrils turned upward just the least bit in the world, and this gave the lip the air of reaching

itself forward always in the invitation of a kiss. It was a lip to rouse the ardor of any man, and it had had its day with Leander. But now?

Perhaps it was of that "But now?" that Helen was in a dim way trying to think. The opera season was dragging its slow length along, and she realized that a barrier, undefined, unconfessed, was growing up between her and her husband. Leander was restive in her presence, impatient of her words, unmelted by her caresses. She almost shrank from offering to kiss him, and yet she felt that if she did not, he would be offended, for she knew how childish he was in regard to all attentions. He expected so much, and gave so little. But it was not so much this that troubled her as the thought that he was slowly coming to give almost nothing, and to value but lightly that which he received. What was at the bottom of it all?

Helen knew that she loved him. That was settled for life, she thought. It was not her fault, she believed. She gave him all, all that she had, and she felt it no shame to confess to her own soul that she had much to give. She knew that never

in the earliest transports of their union had Leander given as much as he had received. He was merely the man, taking boldly that which was his right; she was the woman, whose rapture it was to give and to suffer the deepest pangs of woman's agony of joy in the giving. Leander had told her more than once that she did not understand him; but she knew well that he did not understand her. She was not afraid of that. She was afraid of only one thing. She dreaded to admit that he failed to perceive the fullness and splendor of her love for him. She would not confess it. But away down in the secret place where unconfessed thoughts hide, this one existed in spite of her.

Ever since that day on which the full revelation of his egotism had smitten her so sharply she had been discovering further evidence of Leander's inability to comprehend anything which did not fawn before his greatness. Helen had turned away in disgust from the prostrate attitude of such women as Mrs. Harley Manners, who spent much of their time in telling the tenor how marvelously he had sung this aria or that scene. And why did he sit

and smile complacently when such talk was paraded before him? How could any man who really had the true humility of a great artist listen to the flattery of ignorant amateurs, who could not know whether his art was beautiful or not? How much more easy it would be for Helen to understand his accepting with interest some intelligent bit of praise from one of his fellow singers. Even that strange creature, Nagy Bosanska, would at least know what the vocal excellence of a scene really was.

And at this moment Helen was crossing a drive and had to stop in order to avoid being run down by an automobile. She raised her eyes and saw in the car, in close conversation, her husband and Mlle. Bosanska. As the car slowed down to take a curve they both looked up and saw her. At once Mlle. Bosanska signaled her chauffeur to stop, and, leaning out of the car, called to Helen:

“Mrs. Baroni, come with us, will you not? I have brought your husband to talk to me about some of our scenes together.”

Helen walked up to the side of the car and smiled at them both.

“Thank you, Mlle. Bosanska, but I am out for a good walk, and you two are much better without me. I should only put an end to your studies. You see, I do not understand all these nice little operatic relations and distinctions.”

“What do you mean, Helen?” asked Baroni in a strained tone.

“Just what I say, Leander. You must not try to make what the conductors call ‘readings’ of my simple prattle. Good-by. Have a pleasant ride, and be sure you get your scenes all planned, so that they’ll make hits.”

And the automobile rolled slowly up the slope as Helen strode off in the opposite direction. It was fated to be a morning of small but significant incidents, and this one was not the least significant of them. Helen went on her way, thinking that her words had been unnecessarily pointed. Leander might almost think that she was jealous. Was she? She asked herself that question, and then smiled. What reason had she to suppose that her

husband was interested in the soprano any more than one singer might be interested in another who helped him to make successes?

She had learned not a little about the inner life of an opera house. She knew that all sorts of irregular relations existed in that strange artificial world, where the unreal people seemed to belong to a species different from that commonly called human. She had seen a prima donna holding in abject subjection two men at the same time, and she had watched the comet-like rise of an unknown young singer who was credited with the most impartial distribution of her favor among those in power. She knew, as every one else knew, that Nagy Bosanska and Comparelli, the conductor, had been entangled in a relation of long standing, but she had been told (falsely, indeed) that it was entirely a *liaison de convenance* on the part of the soprano, who had a surprising way of freeing herself from bonds at a moment's notice. But she had discerned nothing in the conduct of her husband to suggest to her anything more disagreeable than the domination of his own splendid egotism.

She had no fear that he was likely to fall a prey to the seductions of Mlle. Bosanska. And even if he were in such danger, it could not well be regarded as anything serious. He loved his wife still.

So she strode along the walk, while the caresses of the ardent breeze heightened the glow in her cheeks and the light in her eyes. And suddenly she became aware of a familiar figure walking on the opposite side of the drive. It was Philip Studley, with his head bent low, his hands in his pockets, and his coat collar turned up. He was going in the direction opposite to that in which Helen was walking, and as they drew nearer together she noted that his face was pale, and that he was biting his lips in an agitated manner. Rapidly she crossed the road and intercepted him.

"Some unfortunate wretch must be going to catch it in the Sunday article," she said, laughing.

He looked up, greeted her in a somewhat confused manner, and then she saw that his eyes were

bloodshot and the lids heavy, as if he had passed a sleepless night.

"Let me walk with you, Philip," she said; "you seem to me to be not quite well."

She slipped her hand inside his arm and smiled kindly at him.

"What do you mean?" he asked; "I am perfectly well."

The eagerness with which he spoke brought a sudden suspicion into Helen's mind. Could he have been dissipating? But she knew that he was one of the steadiest of men.

"I am glad to hear that," she declared; "I suppose it is too much work, then."

"Oh, I don't know," he answered a little impatiently.

"Did you pass Leander?" inquired Helen, hoping to find a diverting topic. "You came down the road just after he and Mlle. Bosanska went up in her car."

Philip stopped short in the path and stared into her face.

"Did you meet them?" he demanded.

"Yes; they invited me to get into the car; but you know they were out talking over scenes, and I should only have been in the way."

"Oh!" That was Philip's reply, and then he strode on in silence.

"You see," continued Helen, "I think that when it comes to matters of their profession, these singers are best left to themselves. They do not care to have outsiders intruding."

"You are not an outsider," said Philip; "you are the man's wife."

"Of course, I am not an outsider in that sense, only in opera affairs."

"They did not invite me to get into the car. She pretended not to see me."

Philip spoke with some bitterness in his tone, and Helen stared at him in astonishment.

"Why should she pretend?"

"Because—because——"

He stopped, and, summoning a smile to his lips, continued with some assumption of carelessness:

"I really don't know. I suppose I am foolishly sensitive."

Helen looked at him very hard, and he turned his eyes away. Then each tried to probe the other's heart. Helen was troubled. She pressed his arm gently and said:

"Philip, I wish I were not anxious about you."

"Are you? Why should you be?"

"I am, but I am not sure that I ought to tell you why."

The young man's cheek flushed, and he turned his head so that he looked squarely into her eyes.

"Say anything you please, Helen. You are an old friend."

Still she hesitated for some moments before she went on.

"Don't spoil your career by becoming interested in a prima donna. No, don't answer. I know you are not in real peril yet; but she is very fascinating, and you are still young, and I do hope to see you at the top of your profession, recognized all over the world as our leading authority."

The young man's lips burned with eagerness to say, "You are too late; I love her;" but he knew that he must not. Unanswerable questions

would follow. He could tell no one. He must go on hugging his secret, ashamed of the thing that had come to trouble his life. In the brief time which had passed there had been no performance calling for the expression of new opinions. Nagy had been repeating her old rôles, and Philip found it easy enough to write non-committal generalities. Furthermore, Nagy was a consummate artist, and there was seldom any difficulty in finding ground for praise. Yet, like all other artists, she had her limitations, and she was sure some day to fail to recognize them, and—what then?

“Helen,” he said at length, “what makes you think that I need this warning?”

“Your strange manner this morning. You actually seemed to be jealous of—my husband.”

“My dear Helen, that is, of course, quite preposterous. You must know that—that—I—what do you mean, anyhow? Do you believe that——?”

“I believe that my husband has no concern in your affair at all,” she replied as kindly as she could. “And I believe that unless you make up

your mind to avoid close friendship with Mlle. Bosanska, she will exercise a detrimental influence upon you. That is quite all that it is possible for me to say in regard to this matter, Philip."

They had reached one of the park gates, and the young man, who could find no words with which to continue the conversation, and who was, indeed, covered with confusion, made a half-intelligible excuse, and hastened away, leaving Helen to finish her walk alone. As she went on close to the park wall, she felt a genuine regret for her old friend, but she had no suspicion of the seriousness of his trouble. She was certain that he would have the determination to keep away from the prima donna, and that, in a brief time, he would be beyond the reach of her charms. And at that very instant Philip was striding through a side street, filled with contending emotions, for he had heard enough of the history of Nagy Bosanska to make him fear.

CHAPTER XII

THE next afternoon he stood in her drawing-room. There she came to him a melting, loving woman, whose embrace was close and tender. He was reassured. He believed that her love was his, and that it was the crowning glory of his life. He had been present on the previous evening, when she sang *Marguerite* for the first time in New York. She was a singer of the kind usually called "phenomenal" by newspapers, because her repertoire, like herself, was wayward and unaccountable. It ranged through a series of rôles which no one woman could be expected to sing. Yet this curious creature, with her singularly capricious temperament and her marvelous voice, which swept the scale from low A to high D, sang them, some well, some ill, but all interestingly.

Philip had sat through the performance of "*Faust*" in a state of dumb amazement. He

found his passionate mistress transformed into a prima donna of the Grand Opéra. Her Marguerite was perfect in every external necessity. It was the essence of polite convention. And Philip knew that Nagy was not polite, not conventional, and, above all things, not phlegmatic. That gave him his cue. He praised her Marguerite in phrases as polished and pretty as her own performance. But he declared that in the subtle and eloquent personality of this matchless prima donna there was far more than the rôle could evoke. The part, therefore, was depressing to her. It chilled the native fire of her soul. It left her with only the resources of her perfect routine to guide her through a faultless, but dispiriting, impersonation. A correct and exquisitely beautiful singer of Gounod's musical ideas, she was none the less not an illusive Marguerite. Every word which Philip wrote was studied in its accuracy. He did not temper the wind to the shorn lamb. He had never done that in his young critical life, and, remembering his compact with Nagy, he compelled himself to speak the truth about the woman

he loved. Had she not told him that she could not love him if he were not true to himself? And so that next afternoon, on his way home from a deadening piano recital at Mendelssohn Hall, he went to her, and she melted into his arms and caressed his hair as she gazed into his eyes.

"*Ami choisi de mon cœur,*" she murmured, "*que je t'aime, que je t'aime.*"

"Say it in English, dear," he whispered.

"How I love you," she cooed, with her ravishing little foreign accent, which made the phrase sound even more caressing than it was.

"You were not hurt by my words?" he asked.

"No, no," she answered swiftly; "how could your sweet honesty, your beautiful courage, hurt me? And Marguerite is not a good part for me, anyhow. That is true. I have not sung Gounod before in New York. I am going to sing Juliette next week. You'll find that much different."

Something in this speech sent a momentary chill through Philip's veins, but he soon rallied. Doubtless, what she said was true. He would wait.

"You wrote exactly what your mind told you,

did you not?" she asked; "you did not let your heart misguide you?"

"That is it, dear; you have said it."

She mused a minute as her head rested on his shoulder. Then she lifted her lips for a kiss, and when he had poured out some of his soul, she murmured:

"You are the first who ever thought my Marguerite cold. How can it be?"

"That is one of the impenetrable mysteries of art," he answered with an indulgent air.

"Like some of your criticisms, eh?"

"Oh, Lord!" he exclaimed; "if you're going to talk about them, I expect we shall soon be buried in impenetrable mysteries."

She laughed and cooed at him, and twined her soft arms about him, and he was most utterly and foolishly happy. Then she looked up into his face with a strange compelling expression in the marvelous green eyes. The air turned rosy around the young man, he trembled, and suddenly clasped her convulsively. Then for a time he knew nothing accurately except that he was trans-

ported into the realms of unspeakable ecstasy. And when he left her an hour later, he was more completely hers than ever before.

He did not see her the next day or two, for he and she were both much occupied with their professional labors. Finally came the performance of "Roméo et Juliette." Philip was nervous. He suffered an indescribable agony for her, but she was apparently as calm as a summer noon. He wished she had not been. She sang the waltz song faultlessly. The scintillating cadenza flashed from her lips deliciously, and the dear public went into raptures. Indeed, the whole first act was most commendable. She was the Lady Juliette in very truth. But with the second act began the descent into elegance. Philip was troubled. Was this the woman who had thrilled the house with her blazing Carmen, with her exquisitely pathetic Mimi, with her superb Tosca? Was this the singer who had poured out for him the immortal treasures of a great spirit in "Wie bist du meine Königin"? And then he had a flash of inspiration. In the morning his paper said this:

“ Beautiful, proud, stately, the daughter of a hundred earls, as it were, this Juliette moved to her fate with the poise of a grande dame of the revolution. Not a flaw was there in the delivery of the unctuous music of Gounod. The river of melody flowed, undulating and glinting, ever onward. The ear was ravished by such singing. But in the end it was the taste, not the emotions, that was satisfied. What was the secret of it? This public well knows that Mlle. Bosanska does not lack temperament. But in this elegant salon music there is something that cabins, cribs, and confines her splendid genius. One easily imagines her moving the world with an interpretation of ‘ *Wie bist du meine Königin,*’ or ‘ *Liebestreu.*’ ”

There was much more of it, but this will suffice to show the trend of the entire article. Philip wrote it in an intense mood, and pondered each word of it. He felt, when he had finished it, that he had turned out something quite beyond cavil. He was sure that, if Nagy were in the least annoyed at his discovery that her temperament

was crushed by Gounod, she would be deeply touched by his reference to her marvelous Brahms singing, and to the very songs which she had sung for him on the day when they had discovered their hearts to each other.

She must know that there was neither soul nor foundation to the music of Gounod, that the score of "Roméo et Juliette" was as far from Shakespeare as that of "Faust" was from Goethe. Nagy, that profound, inscrutable embodiment of the *ewig weibliche*, would penetrate with a single flash of her illuminating intellect to the very bottom of all things. She would know, she would understand, she would always understand. The General was a fool, and there was no wisdom in his heart.

And in her singing of the Brahms songs she had probed the depths of all human experience. What melting tints had come into her voice! What indescribable accents, filled with the uttermost pain of concentrated tenderness, had vitalized every phrase! How could such a woman toy with the table dessert of Gounod? She was

made for life, not for the pastime of a horde of prattling society people, expressing in shop-worn phrases their conventional raptures over this conventional music. And so, confident of her far-reaching vision, he went to her in the afternoon.

"So," she said in a low purring tone, "you don't think I'm fit for an opera singer."

Philip was transfixed in the center of the room. For the instant words would not come to him. Presently he stammered:

"My dear love——"

"Omit that just now," she said, interrupting him with precision. "I'm somewhat afraid, my good friend, that you do not understand the nature of your calling or mine. How dared you to intimate that I would be better as a lieder singer than as the prima donna of Gounod's masterpieces? Stupendous! I, Nagy Bosanska, the idol of two continents, to descend to Carnegie Lyceum and a piano accompaniment!"

"But surely you can be a greater artist there than in a Gounod candy factory. Besides, my dearest, I have never said that you were not

superb in other works. Still, I do believe that you are the greatest lieder singer in the world."

"Greatest idiot you! I'm the first Juliette. Saint-Saëns told me so. I am a prima donna, the great Nagy Bosanska. As for you, you are a fool."

"I thought that it was understood between us that I was to write according to my convictions, and that this would have no relation to our love," Philip said slowly.

"My dear friend, you cannot expect me to love a fool, can you? You are surely a fool. I have no patience with fools."

"I am, perhaps, fool enough to have given you a great love," said Philip bitterly.

"Oh, prince of simpletons! Go, go. Can you not see that you weary me? You are a child. I am a woman. I thought you might bring me joy, but I find that you only tire me. You are too stupid to be the lover of a real woman. Run away and find yourself a little yellow-haired, blue-eyed doll to play with."

With no little dignity Philip picked up his hat.

"You are quite right in your attitude," he said; "I have made a grave mistake. I think we shall do better to remain on opposite sides of the footlights. You sing opera; I shall write comment. You have taught me wonders of life. I have seen a little way into the soul of a woman, and I have tasted the depths of passion. I thank you. I am grown somewhat wiser than I was."

He went to the door of the room, but on its threshold the ruling passion of the critic proved too strong for him, and, with a cold smile on his face, he said:

"Nevertheless, Mlle. Bosanska, it is my opinion that you would be the greatest lieder singer in the world."

"Beast!" she shrieked, and, picking up a vase which was near at hand, she hurled it at him. It crashed against the door as he closed it behind him, and then Nagy threw herself upon a sofa and filled the room with peals of uncontrollable laughter.

CHAPTER XIII

DAY by day the chasm between Helen and her husband widened. She strove in vain to bridge it. She reached out toward him with all the sweet lure of her beautiful spirit. She wove around him a dream of subtle, intangible passion, a thin, lambent flame of pure fire, which burned immortal on the altar of her soul. But it was all to no purpose, for he seemed to be insensible, and her conviction that Leander worshiped only one god, self, grew stronger and stronger. She saw it always in his attitude toward his art. In his demeanor toward herself it took the form of more or less intolerant endurance. Sometimes his impatience was curbed for a period, but only to break forth again with renewed violence.

It was a petty impatience, but it showed that his nature was under a pressure. But when it

came to questions of art, he spoke in no uncertain terms. It was impossible to avoid the conclusion that for Leandro Baroni music was simply the instrument by which he raised himself to glory. The music itself was great or little, according to the opportunities it afforded him.

Helen had tried to persuade him to go with her to certain concerts, such as those of the Kneisel Quartet or the Boston Symphony Orchestra, but he would not consent. There was nothing to be learned, he declared, from listening to fellows sawing fiddles or blowing brass. At the opera house one heard quite enough of them, and most of the time too much. They made such a noise that no human voice could carry above it. The old-fashioned opera composers, who wrote for harpsichord and strings, were the only sensible ones, after all. Of the mysterious influence of Nagy Bosanska on this self-centered nature Helen had as yet no suspicion. She knew that the selfish man was a weak man, but she felt that Leander was entirely and exclusively interested in himself, and prepared to accept worship from any quarter,

so long as he was not required to give anything in return for it.

Nevertheless, daily the tenor was unconsciously drawing closer to the strange Hungarian gipsy. A drifting, purposeless character, he unconsciously leaned against the elemental forces of this other complex and inexplicable soul. For such a man as Leander such a woman was as the great sea to a floating feather. It was inevitable that in time he would hover over the fathomless abyss, fall, and be drawn down into the depths. And all that was required to bring about the catastrophe was a direct controversy between husband and wife. Leander was selfish and weak enough to remember and accept Nagy's invitation to him to come to her if the world was hard upon him.

Trifles have sufficed to start revolutions when everything was ripe. It was the merest of trifles that broke the last of Helen's bridges across the spreading chasm. She was enduring a visitation from Mrs. Harley Manners. That industrious lady, going up and down the world seeking to devour some celebrity, had hoped that she might

gather in the tenor and his wife as the central attractions of a musicale in aid of charity, to be given at her house. Her plan of campaign was to open with a masterly assault on the good will of Helen, and, accordingly, she was enthroned in a chair of state while Helen summoned her fortitude and hardened her ears. In the midst of the conversational monologue Leander unexpectedly arrived, and was greeted with fluttering servility by Mrs. Manners.

"Oh, Mr. Barrett," she said, for she had now advanced to such intimacy that she did not use his stage name; "you are so delightful to come home while I am here. I so much wanted to see you."

Leander smiled his habitual indulgent smile. He accepted all homage as his inalienable right, and accorded it his royal favor.

"I heard your Walther in 'Die Meistersinger' the other night. I am now certain that I never understood the character before. All the other tenors have given me the impression that Walther was a sort of society man, who did not think that

singing was really worthy of his dignity, while you have shown me that he sang as he had to because he was a real poet. It was *so* interesting."

There was much more of the same sort before Mrs. Manners, finding that she really had to look in at Mrs. Truman Bellows' afternoon, hastened down the avenue in her limousine.

"Leander," said Helen, after the departure had been successfully effected, "how can you bear to listen so readily to the meaningless nonsense that woman talks?"

"Nonsense? What nonsense?"

"Such twitter as she emitted about some tenors making her think Walther a society man and your teaching her the truth."

"Well, I did, didn't I?"

" 'Nun sang er wie er musst',
Und wie er musst', so konnt' er's.' "

Helen softly sang the words, and then, smiling, added:

"Leander, I'm sure you don't think that Mrs.

Manners invented that idea. You've heard Hans Sachs say it too often."

"Oh, rubbish. As usual, you are trying to belittle my art."

Helen rose with dignity and looked at him with a serious countenance.

"I beg your pardon, Leander, what was that?"

"I say that you are trying to pooh-pooh the praise which I extract even from such connoisseurs as Mrs. Manners. I don't understand why you assume such a position. You ought to be glad that I arouse her enthusiasm."

"I am sorry to see that you are willing to accept the silly comment of a wholly superficial mind as a tribute to your art. I am only eager to see that art deepen and widen."

"You are what? I see now. I have been coming to it for some time, and now I'm there. I told you long ago that you did not understand me, and now I repeat it. You do not understand me, and it isn't possible for you to do so. You live outside of the world of art, and you can't find the way into it. You misconceive everything

I do, and my greatest successes become failures in your eyes. Hereafter I wish you to keep your opinions of my art to yourself."

"Am I to understand that you prefer those of that distinguished connoisseur, Mrs. Harley Manners?"

"Don't talk like a fool. You make me lose my temper, and that's bad for my voice. Can't you mind your own affairs, and let mine alone? I tell you that you are incapable of understanding the workings of the world of art or the mind of a great artist."

"That sounds to me like a formal declaration of the failure of our marriage, Leander," said Helen very gently.

"You may take it that way if you like," snarled the great tenor, and, flatly turning his back upon her, he strode out of the room.

Ten minutes later he entered the half-dark apartment of Nagy Bosanska. The light which softly glowed through it was a rose madder tint, shot with a shade of burnt sienna. A strange, pallid blood color, it exerted a searching influence

on his vibrating nerves. He stared at the woman. She lay on her couch, clad in a sweeping drapery of thin green, which fell close around every line of her symmetrical body. The train of the robe ran out on the rug before her in a long curve, and the picture she made was serpentine, uncanny, fascinating. She seemed a daughter of the Nile or a Rhine maiden, ready to lure the passing knight to the depths under the Loreleiberg. Leander stood speechless and gazed at her, while she looked back at him with an inscrutable tenderness in her green eyes.

What is the mystery of the flesh? Or is it a mystery? Men have fallen before Delilah, before Cleopatra, before Salammbô, before Fulvia, who saved Rome, before Ninon, the immortal, and even before Fanny Legrand, the Carmen of the back stairs. What destroyed Samson, Antony, Matho, or Lentulus, the senator? No, it was not the mere lure of the sense. It was the irresistible union of the flesh and the devil. The mighty workings of the sex power in the women whose sex reigned imperial and imperious—this

was the force which gave the desire of men dominion over their souls and over their honor. This was the force which laid even their daily common sense to voluptuous sleep upon the perfumed pillows of white breasts.

For the elemental working of the sex force in woman makes her great, arouses all that is splendid in her blood, all that is majestic in her intellect. With this she becomes a queen, sovereign mistress of a man or of men, according to the bent of her spiritual genius. The woman whose sex instincts are only half-developed never reigns at all; she merely marches through a flat world and has her triumphs in the drawing-room or the kitchen. The woman whose soul burns itself out in one great love, and whose sex force arises to its demands, is glorified into a world power. She whose sex impulse sputters first for one object and then for another, is only a local power, for she lacks the foundation of universal greatness, stability. Still, indeed, she is great, for she is the flesh and the devil; and wherever she goes the gates of Eden close behind her, and the

doors of Hell swing wide before her. And she has her power and dominion, and men, poor fools, sell their souls for her and fancy they have found the foot of life's rainbow.

Leander knew Delilah only as an opera character. Of the others he knew nothing. Yet he was gazing into the bottomless deeps of Nagy's eyes, where dwelt all the lost souls of the Delilahs, the Cleopatras, and the Fulvias. She could no more help adventuring into new seas of passion than could a hawk help pursuing a sparrow. The child of Lilith, the incarnation of all those who of old were the world's delight, she burned now with real flame for this new thing, which she saw approaching the borders of her life. She saw herself on the brink of a new love, facing a sleeping soul which she would awaken.

"You have come, *mon ami*," she said in low flute-like tone; "you have waited long."

"I have remembered something you said to me when I was last here," said Baroni.

"Yes?" she responded, with an exquisite rising inflection; "I know what it was. 'When

you are weary and sad, and need to be understood, you will remember that Nagy Bosanska is your friend.' That was it, was it not?"

"Yes," he whispered in a manner half-reluctant. But it was a part of Nagy's magic that she made men say what was in their hearts, even when they most desired to keep it there. The woman made no immediate answer. She seemed to be lost in thought, and presently she shook her head and sighed deeply.

"I have found it impossible, too," she murmured.

"Found what impossible?" asked Leander with astonishment in his voice.

"To get perfect sympathy and understanding from one not of our own world."

Nagy looked down at the rug and sighed. Leander leaned over her and gently took her hand in his.

"Why, Nagy, you seem unhappy."

"No, Baroni, no, I am not unhappy. I am, perhaps, a little, just a little, disappointed, but I could be unhappy only—if I had loved."

He did not know what to say to her, and for a few moments there was a silence, after which she went on in purling low tones:

"I thought I had found one who would be able to enter into my art and to grasp it from outside. But I found that the fool was thinking only of his own work, a silly, stupid, mechanic, who tries to make an art of talking about art."

"Oh!" exclaimed Leander, suddenly enlightened. "That damned critic fellow is the most exasperating idiot on earth. Nagy, I'm amazed at you. How could you take a fancy to him?"

"Only a curiosity, my dear Baroni, only a curiosity. It was he who was serious. I had to send him away. He could not understand. And now she cannot understand."

"She? Who?"

She smiled up at him and shook her head.

"I think you once forbade me to discuss her."

Again a silence fell between them. Nagy broke it.

"Only an artist can understand an artist."

"Of course. These outside people have wild

notions. They make me weary. They talk a lot of idiotic poetry, and think that means something practical to a singer. We who live in the great world of the theater know that what we have to do is to keep in good voice and sing. We've got to look out for our success with the public, and that's the only way to get it."

"My dear Baroni, you are wonderfully young," said Nagy with a smile.

"Rubbish! I'm——"

"I don't mean years. They have meant nothing to you. You are still a boy, Baroni; your soul is asleep, and it is such a splendid soul that I long to see it awake and thrilling the world."

"How is it to be awakened?—oh, I remember. I asked you that once, and you told me."

"Yes, I told you that love would awaken it."

"Well, it hasn't."

"No, not yet. It has not come to you yet."

"Do you mean to tell me that—that—she has never loved me?"

"I cannot speak for her. I speak of you.

Love has not come to you. But it's close, close, close."

Something in her voice sent a shiver through Leander. He remembered again how he had felt when he had been in that same room before, and he then had fled. Now he determined to know what this was which affected him. The restraining power which had held him before was gone. Nagy knew it. Wise as a serpent, she felt that her hour was at hand, and she pulsed with swift little throbs of that indescribable excitement which told her that the incarnated forces within her were at their work.

"Nagy," said Leander, "I do not wish to be asleep."

"Love is a master, not a servant, Baroni."

"I will serve him," said Leander, his breath coming fast. "Can't you teach me the mysteries, Nagy? You are very wonderful, I think."

She was silent, and he touched her hand with his lips. They were hot and dry. Nagy started and shook her head.

"You have so much to learn, you poor boy.

You are not half-grown. But—I think I shall like you.”

She put up a hand and caressed his hair. He bent his head and kissed her very gently. It was all so quiet—so apparently passionless. Nothing could have been more decorous. And he did not know that it was the will of the woman that governed the situation.

“Leander,” she said presently, “can you take me to dinner and—afterward come back here and talk about it to me?”

And thus it came about that, an hour later, he returned and took her to dinner in a restaurant where he was sure that none of the opera-house people would ever go, and also it happened that the little Madeleine Piroux and her faithful Ponitzky had gone there, also to be quite alone, and, although hidden in a corner behind some plants, they saw Nagy and Leander pass through the hall on their way to the rear room. Ponitzky smiled a grim smile.

“Too bad, *ma petite ange*,” he said coolly. “I’m afraid your chances with the Baroni are

very small, now that the Bosanska has taken him in hand."

Madeleine shook her pretty head.

"Peste! What shall I care? I am not in love with him."

"Only because he never gave you more than a kindly look," said Ponitzky, who had always been uneasy about the tenor. "But he is in safe hands now for a time. He will not be much use to you after she is through with him."

"She will destroy him body and soul," said Madeleine, "or she will make him the greatest singer the world has ever known."

"That is what the English call a rather tall order, isn't it?" sneered Ponitzky.

"Not for her," she answered, and then, in her own heart, added, "nor for him."

CHAPTER XIV

IT was years since "L'Africaine" had been given, and the opera house was in a state of excitement. It was conceded that the cast was one of unusual strength, and Comparelli, the genius of the baton, was to conduct. It was rumored that he was in a diabolical frame of mind. All kinds of reasons were given to account for it, but little Madeleine Piroux smiled contemptuously when Ponitzky repeated some of them to her.

"They know nothing. Only Nagy can tell the real reason."

"Then you mean that she has quite thrown him over? The tenor wins. Parbleu! I should not like to sing the 'Paradiso' air to Comparelli's accompaniment to-night."

"Fool! You know that Comparelli conducts better when he is in a vicious temper."

It was, indeed, to be a great performance, with Nagy as Selika, Baroni as Vasco di Gama, Le-

maire, the great French barytone, as Nelusko, Madeleine as Inez, the redoubtable Ponitzky himself as Don Pedro, and the French bass, Caron, as both the priests, Catholic and Brahmin. Tremontini was certain that he should have been the Nelusko, but Comparelli sniffed him out of existence.

Behind the scenes there was the customary bustle. Psychological experts would have found all varieties of deep and hidden emotions in the bosoms of the singers as they smeared themselves with cosmetics or gummed "imperials" upon their lordly chins, but, as a plain matter of fact, their real emotions were mainly those of the one sort who were nervous about reappearing in old rôles long unpractised, and those of the other, buoyantly confident of one more brilliant success.

The technical director, Carroll, swore softly, because he hated the cheap, yet bothersome, stage effects of "L'Africaine." Storch, the chorus master, who was fat and short, exuded vast streams of perspiration, as he rolled about among

his children, and scolded or besought, according to what seemed to him to be the requirements of the case. Manelli, the ballet master, cursed Meyerbeer for the unterpsichorean character of the ballet music, and vowed that his ensembles would go for nothing, and that the public would not know that it was not his fault.

One who had never been concerned in an operatic revival would have been sure that nothing would go right, that "il gran consiglio" would never convene, that the high priest would be Catholic when he ought to be Brahmin, and sing "Ite, missa est" in Madagascar, that the ship would never be stormed, and that the manzanilla tree would shed cocoanuts upon the stage. Yet the inexorable operation of that extraordinary force called "routine" brought order out of seeming chaos, and the various parts of the complicated machine started running in a comparatively smooth manner.

But it was not a pleasant atmosphere behind the scenes. The undercurrent of first-night irritation was unmistakable, and only some small im-

pulse was needed to bring about a childish outburst of the "artistic temperament." Nothing happened in the course of the first scene. The grand council chanted its sonorous deliberations, and the priestly Lemaire pontificated with his customary display of low tones and wide-armed gesture. Leander responded brilliantly to the familiar demand of the noble Don as to why he wished so ardently to plow unknown seas, and his high-flown proclamation of his ambition to incur immortality moved the gallery, the standees, who understood its meaning, and such box occupants as had so far confessed their lack of social duties as to appear early in their seats. Nagy, the most lissome, flashing-eyed, sinuous, and seductive of savage queens, had stood defiant in the presence of the poor occidentals, upon whom she looked with contempt, and had given an indefinite promise of greater wonders to come in the prison scene.

Philip Studley sat in his orchestra-chair from the rising of the curtain, and endeavored manfully to sense Nagy and all her doings as if she had never ceased to be what she should have been

to him, merely a subject for discussion. He drew a long breath of relief as he felt, after her entrance, that it was not going to be so hard, after all. He studied her with a coolness which, indeed, quite astonished him. The footlights and the orchestra pit made a deep and impassable chasm between them. The costume and the make-up placed a curtain of unreality there. He could not regard this tufted savage as the throbbing creature whom he had held in his arms. He was under the spell of the illusion of the theater. Even he, the professional chronicler of incidents, could not wholly escape the working of that strange fantasy. There was much applause after the choral chantings of the first act. Philip went out into the corridor and stretched himself. Behind the scenes the unpleasant smell of grease paint increased. The singers hastened from the stage to their dressing-rooms. Their painted countenances glistened with streams of fluent perspiration. Their musty costumes, also moistened, assisted the paint in adding variations to the depressing theme of stage air. They were utterly

unpoetic persons. They were disillusion of the most unhappy type. The most palpitating of all *matinée* girls would have shrunk from the open arms of the great Baroni. The most ardent pursuer of stage beauties would have drawn back from a close inspection of the incomparable Mlle. Bosanska.

“Pouf!” exclaimed this same incomparable soprano, as she rushed off the stage, where she had waited after her exit out of curiosity to see the end of the act; “pouf! The idiot of a Meyerbeer! What an entrance for a prima donna!”

“You get your chance in the next act, don’t you?” said the stage manager, who was laughing mildly at her vehemence. “The first act is the tenor’s, and it is pretty nearly the end of him, too, isn’t it?”

At this instant Nagy was out in the hallway beyond the stage and leading to certain dressing-rooms, and here she was almost swept from her feet by the rush of Mrs. Harley Manners. In those days only a very few favored persons had the *entrée* to the sacred regions behind the scenes.

The newspaper men and the directors, composer's agents, and some few similar dignitaries, were on the door list of the portal between the stage and the "front of the house," but one of Mrs. Harley Manners' specialties was to be where she had no business, and she had a way of penetrating the stage region even in the course of a first-night performance.

"Oh, Mlle. Bosanska," she exclaimed. "How wonderful you are! Your costume and your acting! Oh, I cannot tell you what I really feel. You have reawakened for me the visions of Cleopatra."

"But contain yourself, Madame. I have yet done nothing. The first scene belongs to the tenor. Save your raptures till after the next act. *Au revoir.*"

Nagy, who could be intolerably rude when she wished to, undulated down the hallway, exhibiting a very graceful back to the discomfited Mrs. Harley Manners, who vainly sought for Leandro in order that she might say things to him or ask him unanswerable questions. Nagy, however, knew

that Leandro was still taking curtain calls, and that he would find a way to dodge the omnipresent woman.

When Nagy turned her rounded shoulders on Mrs. Harley Manners, she found herself confronted by two directors of the opera company, men in exquisitely perfect evening clothes, and finished for social use till they positively shone with "position." Nagy looked them both up and down with undisguised admiration. She was a lawless and ungovernable little creature, and she had an inexpressible contempt for men whom she regarded as mere appendages to large fortunes. The various attempts of money magnates to win the favor of Nagy had met with disastrous failure. The creatures could not even begin to understand her, but they adored her extraordinary physical charms. And now these two stood before her, smiling their elegant smiles and talking their habitual prattle.

"Most charming, indeed, Mlle. Bosanska," said one; "you are really marvelous in costume and make-up."

"Indeed, quite so," said the other: "and this make-up becomes you, too."

"Oh, thank you so much," answered Nagy demurely. "But I can return your compliments. You are both quite perfect in your costume and make-up, too. I'm sure you must look interesting in your boxes, but I regret that I can't see you from the stage."

And the impudent beauty turned the flawless shoulders on them, too, and glided away down the hall. Presently, when the discomfited directors had passed out to the front of the house, Leander came through the iron door leading from the stage to the dressing-rooms, and found himself gazing into the eyes of Madeleine Piroux. She had waited to have one fleeting word with him.

"You are in the best of voice, my friend. You will have another triumph."

"And you, too, Mademoiselle. You are looking your best and singing like a little angel."

And he went on, leaving her smiling rather bit-

terly as she realized how much his praise might mean to her if it only meant a little more to him. From up on the second floor of the dressing-rooms came the rumble of Lemaire's voice. He was not satisfied with his recitatives in the first scene, and was vocalizing to warm up. Ponitzky was roaring like a bull, and occasionally pausing to swear in indescribable Polish. He had flatted badly in the first scene. So had Caron, who was coughing and sputtering and cursing the remains of a cold which he had thought was entirely gone. Every one except Nagy and Leander was in a tempestuous humor. But Leander found Nagy waiting for him in front of his door. She smiled softly and murmured:

"It will be very good to-night. I shall certainly kiss you as you sleep in the prison."

"I hope you will not forget," responded Leander with ardor in his voice.

"I shall talk to you after the next act."

"Where?"

"Here. Do you find it objectionable? Are you afraid of the scandal?"

“What, in an opera house? Is there anything else in one?”

He laughed, and she glided off to her dressing-room, which was further along the same hall. Leander entered his room and sat down to wait for the next act. He was well pleased. The house was packed. He had been enthusiastically received, much more so than Nagy, for many of the subscribers failed to recognize her in the make-up of a queen of Meyerbeerian Madagascar. People came and went in the passage outside of his dressing-room, but they made no attempt to intrude upon him. His dresser, long trained in the cunning of opera houses, stood on guard at the door while Leander lay back in his easy-chair, closed his eyes, and permitted his whole body to relax. It was his way of resting in the *entr'actes*. The dressing-room was not a reposeful retreat, and it was necessary to close one's eyes. On one side was a long shelf covered with bottles, boxes, brushes, and other paraphernalia of “make-up.” Above this shelf hung a mirror, and on each side of the mirror was a glaring electric light. On the

opposite side of the room was a full-length mirror in which the tenor might observe his figure when arrayed for the stage. There was a closet in one corner, two or three hard-looking chairs, a ragged rug on the floor, and rows of hooks for hanging up clothing. There was none of that luxury which the Sunday newspapers sometimes described.

As Leander lay limp in his one comfortable chair, he suddenly chanced upon a resemblance between the story of the opera and the entrance of Nagy into his life. Selika followed Vasco di Gama into a strange land, and afterward he went with her to her own country, a kingdom over the seas, enchanted, magical, mystic, almost fabulous, where vivid colors filled the eye, and burning thoughts the soul. Swimming in this flood of tropical glory, Vasco di Gama forgot all but the splendor of Selika's eyes.

“‘E del tuo ciglio o ciel il divorante ardor
Come di fiamma un raggio passo nel mio seno.’”

He hummed the music in a half-whisper and smiled. Would it be so? Would Nagy be the

Selika of his life, and Helen the pale and uninteresting Inez? He forgot for the moment that Inez carried off Vasco, after all, while Selika, despairing, died under the manzanilla tree. But Nagy would surely never do anything so weak as that. Just then the dresser stood aside and permitted little Madeleine Piroux to put her head into the room. She could not remain away. There was a slow pain dragging at her gentle heart, and yet she could not refrain from twisting the knife in the wound. She had no hope that, like Inez, whom she impersonated, she would find her suspicions that he loved Selika to be groundless.

"Are you rested, Baroni?" she asked softly.

"Yes, I'm ready. But we're not called yet."

At that moment Nagy came slowly through the hall, and paused just behind Madeleine.

"What a charming picture you make together," she murmured. "It is a grand pity that I must separate you, is it not?"

Madeleine turned and gazed directly into Nagy's eyes. She shrugged her pretty French

shoulders, and walked quietly away. Nagy lowered her head and sent from under her brows a strange glance from the wonderful green eyes.

"Foolish child, is she not?" she said to Baroni.

"She's a nice little girl, Nagy; that's all, and you—you are a woman."

"Do not be alarmed, my dear Baroni. I am not troubled. But it is bad for her. She would sing better if she loved Ponitzky—the great pig."

The call boy appeared at this moment, and summoned them for the prison scene. Leander walked languidly down to the stage and stretched himself upon the couch in the alcove, while Nagy idly extended her hand to the property man to receive the fan with which she was to soothe the sleeping Vasco. It was in this scene that the smoldering fires of Nagy's temperament sprang to flame. The audience suddenly awakened to the fact that there was a tremendous force of character in the savage queen, and between her and the crushed and fragile Inez, who found herself

enmeshed in the toils of fate, the tragic contrast was moving.

The curtain fell amid a storm of plaudits. Nagy and Madeleine went together before the audience. Nagy led the little French soprano most gracefully, and, when in the center of the stage, calmly dropped the hand, turned her back on Madeleine, and appropriated all the applause to herself. She did not so much as bestow a fragment of a glance on either Baroni or Ponitzky, who had rather humbly followed the two women, and were now awkwardly standing at either side. It was a characteristic opera-house scene, but only a few reporters and other long-practised observers detected the significance of it. In less than five minutes half a dozen of the news-gatherers were on the stage striving to find out whether there was a "story" in the slighting of Mlle. Piroux by Mlle. Bosanska, but they could get no facts.

"I quarrel with this angel!" exclaimed Nagy. "She is an angel, is she not?"

This question was shot full in the face of the uncomfortable Ponitzky, who gallantly answered:

“ A real angel ; indeed, our only angel, is it not so, Nagy ? ”

And thereupon the big basso retired with a profound chuckle. The yellowest reporters persisted for a time, but finally abandoned the subject, and hastened away to the press-room to write it up anyhow. Nagy, true to her promise, went to Leander's dressing-room to talk to him, as neither of them had any change to make till after the next scene. It was not long afterward that Philip Studley passed through the door between the auditorium and the stage. The impresario had sent a message to him, asking for the privilege of a few minutes' conversation in his office, which was in the rear part of the building. Philip was not at all familiar with the region behind the scenes, and he quite easily went astray. Instead of passing down the corridor leading to the offices, he turned into the hallway upon which the dressing-rooms opened. It was at this unpropitious instant that Leander's dresser, standing on guard outside the door, spied a certain chorus damsel in whom he took a particular in-

terest, and he slipped a few paces down the passageway to speak a word in her somewhat too red ear. And thus it happened that when Philip saw a door on his left hand partly open, and thought it must be the one which he was seeking, he walked into it, found himself in the dressing-room of the tenor, and beheld that famous artist holding Mlle. Nagy Bosanska in a close embrace.

For a few seconds there was a tense and uncomfortable silence. It was Nagy who first recovered composure.

"This is, indeed, an unexpected honor, Mr. Studley. May we inquire how we came to deserve it?"

"I have very few words to say to either one of you. I had no knowledge that this was your trysting-place. I was trying to go to the office. I lost my way. I do not apologize. You, Mademoiselle, know quite well why I do not. I am delighted to gain some insight into your true nature. It is——"

"That's enough of that sort of talk," ex-

claimed Leander in a low tone; "if you've anything to say that's to the point, say it and get out; but omit Mlle. Bosanska's name, do you understand?"

"Perfectly. I presume you are authorized to protect Mlle. Bosanska? I congratulate you."

"My dear young friend, don't try to be sarcastic; it does not suit you at all. And my position in relation to Mlle. Bosanska is none of your damned business."

"That, my dear Mr. Baroni, is pure assumption on your part. I regard as my business anything which is likely to affect the welfare of a woman much superior to Mlle. Bosanska, a woman who has honored me with her friendship for years, a woman——"

"Who chances to be my wife. You certainly do not lack for assurance. One might think you the authorized protector of Mrs. Baroni."

"Why, you cad!" said Philip hotly; "you are willing to make innuendoes against your own wife, but you demand that the position of Mlle. Bosanska be not discussed. I am sorry to have

spoken to you at all. I have certainly lowered myself by doing so."

"You get out of my room!" cried Leander, quite losing his temper and moving toward Philip. But Nagy sprang before him and threw her arms around his neck.

"Stop, stop," she said in a low tone, "you must bear with this young man, my dear Baroni. His emotions are in a state of much confusion. He is not master of himself. He really is quite at sea. He has been most unfortunate in his relations with women, and he does not see clearly. Of course he will go away."

"I see many things much more clearly than I used to," said Philip; "I have had some instruction from a profound mistress of the art of life."

"Oh, yes, I forgot for the moment," said Leander, suddenly beginning to laugh. "I remember now. He aspired to the position which he now so delicately charges me with occupying. But '*la commédia e finita*,' so far as you are concerned, my dear young friend."

"You speak truly," said Philip, who had partly

regained his composure. "I trust that in your own case it will not be something worse than a comedy. Good-evening."

The young man retired with an approach to dignity, while Leander and Nagy stood looking at each other inquiringly. Nagy slowly shook her head.

"You see, Leandro, he was quite impossible; but I cannot help feeling sorry for him. He seems always to be unsuccessful in love. Poor infant! It is so foolish of him to adore your wife."

Leander stood in reflection for a few moments.

"I can't imagine Helen giving any serious consideration to a prig like that," he said.

"Would it matter greatly if she did?"

In his heart Leander felt that it did. He did not relish the idea of Helen's finding comfort so easily. But when he looked into Nagy's liquid eyes and read what he saw there, he tossed aside all reflection.

"Perhaps it wouldn't matter at all," he said; "some time or other there is sure to be an ex-

plosion, I suppose. Things can't go on this way."

"And nothing else at all counts," murmured Nagy, with her lips close to his cheek, "so long as you and I are together, dear."

And then it seemed to be clear to Leander that it would be better if the empty pretense of his married life were to come to an end right away. What business had Studley to act as if interposing between him and Helen? Leander suddenly felt that he was badly used, and he hugged the idea to his heart.

CHAPTER XV

THE cause of complaint, once domiciled in the tenor's soul, acted as such cherished ideas generally do. It behaved like the genie who was let out of the box and spread to such proportions that he obscured the heavens. True, this particular evil one did not spoil Leander's Vasco di Gama, but as soon as the final curtain had fallen he developed with amazing rapidity.

Helen sat in her orchestra stall and watched the performance with a dull pain at her heart. She never went behind the scenes any more. She disliked the atmosphere; she disliked the singers. Their whole attitude toward what they called their "art" discouraged her. And it hurt her to think that Leander dwelt in this surrounding, and that he was thoroughly contented in it. She listened to the golden tones of his magnificent voice, and smiled when the audience burst into

rapturous applause. She knew that Leander thoroughly understood his instrument, and that he played upon it with a master's technique. But she also knew that in the perfect placing of his tones, in the exquisite finish of his phrasing, and in the elegant disposition of his nuances, lay for Leander the whole of his art.

It was no triumphant evening for her when he carried people off their feet by his delivery of the "Paradiso." She hated the aria, because of its claptrap devices and its superficially clever appeal to the gallery. She wished that Leander would sing real music. She could not refuse the tribute of admiration to Nagy. Meyerbeer might be only theatrical tinsel, but the gipsy's temperament was real. She vitalized the empty measures with real emotion. Helen recognized it, and said to herself, "She is a greater artist than he." And then she thought of the rumors she had heard about his attentions to Nagy.

"No," she said to herself, "there can be nothing substantial in any of it. Leander is too self-centered to develop an infatuation for any

one but himself. I am not sure that it would not be a good thing for him to conceive a passion for the strange Hungarian. I cannot pierce his shell of Self. If she should do so, he might discover his own soul. For there is one to discover. I have tried to awaken it in vain. And yet God knows that I have given him what no other woman can."

And as she sat thus thinking she was divinely adorable. There was a sweet humidity in her beautiful eyes, and a gentle flush on her delicate cheek, as she recalled to herself the intensity of some exquisite moments now unhappily long past. She fervently desired to bring them back, but she could not discover the way, for her kisses fell dead upon Leander's lips, and her embraces lax upon his breast.

She did not wait for him after the performance. She had never made a practice of that. In the early days of the season she had sometimes waited, and they had ridden home together in her car, Leander well pleased with himself and his evening's success, she trying to lead the conversation

away from the endless theme, but in vain. They had both insensibly grown weary of it, and Leander had begun to invent excuses for going home alone. So she accepted the situation, and rode away with some woman friend whom she had invited to the opera. On this night she went alone, and, as the car turned into the Avenue, she gazed listlessly out of the window at the wet and shining street.

It had been raining, and the Avenue, though crowded with whirring cars, had a dour and depressing aspect. The shops were all dark, and shadows fell from their gloomy fronts across the bedraggled pavement. Here and there a dwelling, still dignified among the impudent intruders from the world of trade, shed a faint yellow ray from the transom or, perhaps, even showed illumination in some of its spacious windows. Pedestrians tramped heavily along the sidewalks with bowed heads and hidden faces. The fine, penetrating rain, which was swept in from the grim Atlantic by a chill easterly wind, searched every corner and cranny. Even in her

well-appointed car Helen felt the touch of its dampness. She was glad when the vehicle rolled up to the entrance of the great hotel, and she was able to go to her comfortable apartment.

It was not just what she wished. If she had enjoyed her own way, she would have had a house and servants, a real home. But Leander had wished to live in a hotel. It was not worth while, he thought, to take a house just for a season, and she had desired to please him. So there they had been, and as his demeanor toward her had changed, so she had felt her solitude all the more. She entered her drawing-room and, letting her wraps fall into the ready arms of her maid, sank into a corner of the sofa.

"Louise," she said, "you may bring me my drink here."

The maid slipped noiselessly from the room, and presently returned with some biscuits and a little silver urn. Helen had early formed the habit of having supper before retiring. She had formerly waited always for Leander, but now his movements after the opera were too uncertain.

Sometimes he came directly home, but quite as often he went to a restaurant or some club. On this particular evening he reached the apartment about an hour after Helen. He went directly to their room. Helen was sitting by a small table, clad in a silk-and-lace peignoir. She was prepared for retiring, but she had felt sleepless and unready to go to bed. She was nervous, she could not tell why; but she seemed indefinitely to expect something. So she sat in the bedroom trying vainly to read. She and Leander occupied the same room, for neither of them believed in that singular form of marriage in which the husband occasionally visits his wife's chamber, with an unexpected demand that she accept his embraces as she might accept lightning from a clear sky. Leander and Helen had never discussed the matter, but when he had arranged the renting of their apartment, he had chosen one in which each could have a separate dressing-room, with their bedroom between. Leander entered from his dressing-room, and Helen quietly rose from her seat, went over to him, put her arms around his neck, and

kissed him. He accepted the kiss passively, and then said:

"Why haven't you gone to bed?"

"I am not at all sleepy, Leander; indeed, I am much too wakeful."

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded.

"I don't know, I'm sure. Nothing serious."

Leander passed into his dressing-room and changed from his dress coat into a loose jacket.

"How did you like the performance?" he asked when he returned.

"I thought it was very good, indeed," answered Helen in a rather dull tone.

Leander looked at her suspiciously for a moment. The expression in his eyes was not a pretty one. Then he said in a keen tone:

"See anything of your particular friend Studley to-night?"

Helen glanced up, rather startled by the question and his manner, and this only served to deepen his suspicions.

"Why, yes, Leander, of course. Philip always comes and says a few words to me when I

am at the opera. He is one of my oldest and, I think, my best friends."

"Is he, really?"

Leander's tone was bitter with sneering innuendo. Helen, however, appeared not to notice this.

"Yes, he has always been a good friend to me. I wonder that you do not recall that you desired me to see that this friendship did not wane. I was not quite sure of your meaning at the time."

"And now you are. Is that what you mean? Well, let me tell you now that I no longer desire that you keep this friendship warm. The fellow is no friend of mine, and you know it."

"I certainly know nothing of the kind, Lee. I am sure he admires you greatly."

"Is it evidence of his admiration that he always thinks he must write about me with a sort of patronizing toleration? What does he know of such an art as mine, anyhow?"

"Lee, how can I tell why he writes as he does? It is not a subject which he and I can discuss. I cannot question him about his criticisms of you,

and he never mentions the subject to me. I am sure he tries to be as kind as he can."

Leander strode across the room, lighted a cigarette, and flung himself into a chair. His face was flushed, and his eyes had an unpleasant glitter. He looked not unlike a spoiled child in a bad humor. Helen dimly felt that his temper was something of that sort, and she endeavored to be indulgent. But she had not read him rightly.

"Did you," he suddenly asked, "see Studley to-night before or after he was in my dressing-room?"

"I did not know that he was in your room at all."

"Oh, indeed. Well, he was there after the prison scene. Did you see him before that?"

"No; I saw him when he was going out after the ship scene."

"I don't believe you," said Leander sullenly.

"If you are going to indulge in talk of that kind, Leander, I think our conversation had better end for to-night."

"Oh, you think so, do you? Well, our con-

versation is not going to end just yet. I have something more to say."

Helen, who had risen, resumed her seat. She was striving bravely to be patient, for she felt now that something serious underlay the mood of her husband.

"Have you ever had any conversation," he asked, "with your fine friend Studley about my acquaintance with Mlle. Bosanska?"

"Is there any reason why I should speak of it to any one?" asked Helen calmly, as she gazed frankly into his eyes.

Leander's temper rushed swiftly to the boiling-point. He sprang from his chair, crossed the room in three strides, and stood in front of her in an attitude actually menacing. She wondered vaguely what he was going to do to her. But he contented himself with agitated speech and much brandishing of the arms.

"Your friend Studley came into my dressing-room and found me in conversation with Mlle. Bosanska. He had the impudence to make sarcastic comments, to intimate that I ought not to

be there with her, to insinuate that there was some disloyalty to you in it. Now I want to tell you right away that I won't stand anything of that sort. I will not have any whippersnapper of a newspaper man, just because he is in your confidence, coming into my room and——”

Helen had risen and placed herself directly in front of him. She had gently shaken her head in mild protest as he spoke, and at length had stretched out her two ivory arms and laid her dainty hands on his shoulders. Then she interrupted the rush of his words.

“Lee, my dear, dear Lee, you mustn't say such things to me. I have no knowledge of Philip's movements, nor have I any control over them. But you may be perfectly certain of one thing, my dear, and that is that I would scorn to spy either directly or indirectly on your actions. I have never given the least thought to your friendship for Mlle. Bosanska—except, except——”

She hesitated. Her rigorous regard for truth urged her to qualify her statement, yet she hardly knew how.

"Except what?" demanded Leander, seizing her hands and roughly removing them from his shoulders.

"Except that I have thought that maybe in the end it might help you to discover your own real self."

Helen's beautiful, soft eyes were lowered, and tears gathered under their fringes. Her hands drooped at her sides, and the rising and falling of her small round bosom could be seen through the filmy laces of her peignoir. Her curved crimson lips were gently parted, and her pearly teeth shone visible, while her breathing, almost sighing, was clearly audible. She was so lovely and so desirable that if Leander had not been obsessed by self, he would have clasped her in his arms and kissed her upon the eyes. But he was driven by forces which he did not comprehend.

"My real self, my real self! There we have it," he exclaimed. "You have from the beginning tried to tell me that there is something wrong with my character, that I don't understand the meaning of my own art. And your devoted

friend, Philip Studley, your extremely devoted friend, agrees with you to a jot. Now I want to tell you once and for all, as I have told you before, that neither you nor he know what you are talking about. I know my business. You don't know it. From the day we were married you have failed to understand me. No, you needn't speak. I know I've told you that before, too. But I don't intend to tell it again. You can't bring yourself into the life of an artist at all. Mlle. Bosanska does know how to understand my art, and if I choose to talk to her about it instead of to you, you've no one to blame but yourself."

Helen looked up sorrowfully, and the tears glistened in the corners of her eyes.

"I do not quite know what all this means, Leander; but if you can get from Mlle. Bosanska sympathy and understanding which I cannot give you, I see no reason why you should not do so."

"That's right!" he cried; "tell me that if I'm not satisfied with you, I can go to the devil with her. That's what you mean, of course. All right, all right. Anyhow, this is the end of every-

thing between you and me. We'll have no more pretenses, anyhow. I'll leave you to yourself. You can have this room, and I'll sleep in my dressing-room. Good-night."

He wheeled sharply around and rushed into his dressing-room. He slammed the door behind him, and the next second Helen heard the key turn in the lock. She almost smiled in the midst of her grief, for the act struck her as intensely childish. And so, indeed, it was. All of Leander's conduct had been childish, and wholly consistent with the character of a spoiled opera singer. But that did not render the trial easier for the wife. She walked to her mirror, and, standing in front of it, let the peignoir slip from her shoulders. She gazed thoughtfully at the ravishing image before her. She slowly shook her head.

"It is not that, not that," she said to herself. "I am more beautiful than she, and I give him a grand passion which she cannot even imagine, for I give him my whole life, my soul forever and forever. But he does not know, he does not un-

derstand. And it is all because he does not yet know his own soul. Suppose it wakes for her; what then?"

And drawing her garment about her again, she crossed the room and fell on her knees beside her lonely bed, begging Heaven to uncoil the tangled skein which was winding itself around her life.

CHAPTER XVI

THE season was at its end. The customary "gala" performance of selected acts from various operas had been given, not on a subscription night, of course, but as one of the numerous extras which had become features of the time in opera world. This out of the way, the real farewells took place. Neither Leander nor Nagy had been implicated in the proceedings of the "gala" performance. They were reserved for the last *matinée*. They had been heard together once more in "Carmen," and the intense seductiveness of the Hungarian's impersonation had again wrought its unfailing effect, while Leander's matchless delivery of the flower song had thrown five hundred "*matinée* girls" into indescribable raptures. Of course little Madeleine Piroux sang Micaela, while Tremontini had the opportunity of his career in Escamillo. And because Tremontini sang, the Toreador Feramordi was in the

theater and keeping close watch on all his doings. Ponitzky strolled into the house after the third act, ready to take the little Piroux away with him. Comparelli conducted and smiled wickedly up at Nagy, whose defection from him was now common knowledge behind the scenes.

After the matinée many of the singers gathered in the same little Italian restaurant. The greasy atmosphere of the place gave them a pleasure which they could not have defined. They slowly relaxed after the strain of the day. Ponitzky lolled in his chair like a huge bear at play and quizzically gazed at his mistress. He blew cigarette smoke across the table, and in grumbling bass tones said:

“Pity you’re not engaged for South America, my angel.”

Madeleine returned his gaze steadily, and answered:

“I do not feel so. I’m rather glad of it.”

Ponitzky smiled an evil smile.

“It will be a most agreeable season for Baroni and Nagy.”

The little French soprano shrugged her shoulders and looked around the room with an assumption of indifference.

"Ah," continued Ponitzky, "I see it matters not at all to you. I was mistaken."

"Ponitzky," said Madeleine quietly, "you and I have been together about long enough, I think. I am of the opinion that you are not worth while. I ceased to care for you long ago; yet while you were willing to treat me decently I was willing to continue with you. But I am not obliged to swallow your abuse."

She rose from the table, but Ponitzky put up his hand and arrested her.

"Sit down," he said; "don't be a fool. But you are right. It is wrong for me to taunt you. I am really fond of you, Madeleine. Can you blame me for being hurt when I know that, if you could have Baroni, you would leave me for him to-morrow? But you know it is impossible. Nagy has him in her claws."

Madeleine had resumed her seat. She smiled faintly at the big basso.

"Ponitzky," she said, "you haven't been unkind to me, on the whole. And I'm accustomed to you. You are a habit, a bad one, but still not easy to break. Only you must not try to hurt me. I crave kindness. I have been alone in the world for years. I have no relatives, no friends. I accepted your companionship because I was so lonely. I am content to remain with you, if you will be kind."

"Mon Dieu, little girl," said Ponitzky, leaning across the table toward her, "I'm sorry. I will never hurt you again. You are a good girl, and I will try to make you happy."

"As for Baroni," she went on; "he is nothing to me—never can be. You can rest easy as to that. And his wife will save him from Nagy."

"Well, not in Buenos Ayres at any rate."

"What do you mean?"

"She does not go."

Ponitzky smiled another evil smile. He could not help them. He was saturated with the rôle of Mephistopheles in which he had made his greatest success in three operas, Gounod's, Boito's, and Berlioz's.

"She does not go! Then it is true, that which I suspected. All is not well with them. But stop; how do you know this?"

"Why, *ma vie*, every one knows it. Stahlberg, the transportation man, has engaged passage for Baroni and his valet, but not for his wife."

"But that may not mean anything except that she is to go by another steamer."

"He sails on the *Vasari* on the twentieth. She does not go; be sure of that. Ask Tremontini, or better, Feramordi. She is going."

Tremontini and his beloved contralto were sitting at the next table with Abadista and two or three others.

"I hear," said Madeleine, leaning toward them, "that you are going down on the same steamer as Baroni and his wife."

"With Baroni, yes," replied Feramordi shortly, "with his wife, no. She will not visit South America. She remains in North America. The climate is said to suit her much better."

There was a ripple of cheap laughter and Madeleine turned away sore at heart, for she

realized that there must have been a rupture between Leander and Helen, and she well knew that the wife was worth a score of women such as the fascinating Hungarian. The information was accurate. The breach which had opened on the night of the "L'Africaine" performance had widened. The husband and wife had continued to dwell apart, and Leander had determined to leave her behind him when he went to the Argentine capital. Helen was not sure that this would not be best for him. She still believed that he needed the scarifying experience of some great spiritual awakening, and she hoped that a temporary separation would bring it about. For the idle comments of her acquaintances she cared nothing, but she knew that these could be quieted by her assertion that she could not risk the Argentine climate. But Helen did not know all that was in Baroni's mind. If she had, she might perhaps have insisted on going with him.

* * * * *

It was understood when Leander sailed that Helen was to join him in Europe, whither he

was to go directly from South America. His letters from Buenos Ayres were brief and business-like. He and Helen had agreed that at least the outward appearance of marriage must continue. In fact they had not actually spoken of this in plain words, but nevertheless they understood each other. He wrote to her when it was necessary, but at no other time. She answered him in the same way. They were merely drifting. The South American engagement lasted till mid-July and Helen passed much of the hot weather out of New York. She took advantage of this opportunity to visit her few relatives. She had little in common with them, but the formalities of life demanded that she show them some attention. It was when she returned to New York to prepare to go to Europe that she obtained a clearer insight into the situation. She received a letter from Leander, which read thus:

“I do not see any reason why there should be a continuation of an impossible relation between us. The best thing for us to do is to continue

apart. You will be happier, I am sure, and so will I. It was a mistake for you to marry an artist, for the world in which he moves is not your world and will never become so. You cannot adjust yourself to its requirements and cannot accustom yourself to its flexible conditions. I have accepted certain engagements in Europe for the next year and shall not sing in the United States. I am satisfied that it will be far better for my future success to remain absent for at least one season. This will render it easy for you to account for your being away from me. You can say that you do not find yourself in good health in St. Petersburg and other places where I am going to sing, and that you prefer to have an established residence instead of traveling about. Or possibly you will prefer to give some other reason which does not occur to me. Settle it to suit yourself. At any rate, you will be better off away from me."

The letter fell from her trembling fingers. She threw up her hands and covered her eyes. Her

head swam with thick heavy pulsations and she had a feeling of suffocation. Her gentle bosom heaved convulsively and her whole frame shook with the agony of this blow, so cruelly and coldly dealt. For there was no faintness in Helen's love. It was the well-spring of her life, and Leander's weaknesses had only served to arouse in her that beautiful protective instinct of maternity which is a part of every true woman's love for erring man. For half an hour she lay back in her chair unable to move or think. Her senses were stunned, her faculties rendered inoperative. But she was too strong to remain smitten into inactivity. The splendid forces of her character slowly gathered themselves and her dominant intellect reassumed its control. She suddenly sprang from the chair, with flashing eyes and hands clenched till her nails turned white.

"It shall not be!" she exclaimed. "Now it is between her and me. Well, so be it. But I must think, I must think."

She went and stood by a window and gazed at the slow-moving white clouds over the ugly house-

tops. Out of the long and deep reflection she drew the outlines of her course of action. This was to be a battle of woman's wits, not the wild turmoil of unbridled emotions. And one of the things Helen evolved was a letter to her husband. In it she said:

"I am content to follow your wishes. I need hardly tell you that I know the true reason of your actions. But I feel only commiseration for you. I shall certainly not sue for a divorce. It would be foolish and it would do you, at least, no good. You might be stupid enough to marry her, and then you would soon be suing for a divorce yourself, for she will tire of you. You will not trouble yourself to send me any of your earnings. You know that I have plenty of money of my own, and I am sure that in the circumstances you will require all you can get. You know my permanent address. If you have occasion to communicate with me, please do so. Perhaps it would be as well for you to send me a few newspaper clippings from time to time in order that I may be able to

tell people where you are and all about your immense successes."

And this reference to his successes was the only note of reproach in her carefully composed letter. It was in London that Leander read it. He was sitting in the Savoy restaurant with Nagy. The familiar crowd of diners was around them and a few recognized them and pointed them out. No one, however, attracts attention for a long time in the Savoy, for all the driftwood of the world floats through it.

"Interesting letter, mon ami?" murmured Nagy.

"Rather," replied Leander. "It is refreshingly cool at any rate."

"From madame, I presume."

"Yes," answered Leander shortly and with an absent air, as he folded it and replaced it in his pocket.

"Reproachful?"

"Not at all. That is what astonished me a little."

"No hostilities?"

"No; she says she will not begin any action."

Nagy's green eyes seemed to turn inward and she held deep communion with herself.

"This woman will bear watching. She knows things. But if she imagines that I am going to discover Leander's soul for him in order that she may bask in the sunlight of a great awakening she does not understand Nagy Bosanska. And she will not take action for the divorce. Then she is afraid he might marry me and that he would be lost to her for good and all. Why, the silly woman still loves him and she has hopes. He is mine and I mean to keep him."

"What are you thinking in there behind those eyes, Nagy?" asked Leander.

"The thoughts of a woman."

"That may mean a thousand things," said he, smiling. "But you will tell me at least one of them, will you not?"

"Yes; she is afraid that we might marry."

"Why, she says as much."

"So I thought. But what is marriage to us? How long will you love me, Leander?"

"As long as you make me, light of my life."

"Already? You are learning fast, my friend. You grow wiser by the minute. You see what it means to dwell in the heart of Nagy Bosanska."

Leander hummed a line from "Lohengrin":

"'Dein Lieben sei mein stolz Gewähr.'"

Nagy smiled and lifting her glass looked intently at him over the rim as she said in her softest tone:

"The world is ours."

CHAPTER XVII

IN early August Helen sailed for Cherbourg. Her thoughts had been countless in the course of the days which followed the announcement of Leander's plans. Her bitter grief did not desert her, but neither did that splendid resolution which had formed itself into words on the eventful day. It was to be a struggle for the soul of a man and Helen had her plan of campaign. She was never ignorant of the whereabouts of her recreant husband and his serpentine charmer. The operative world has no secret places. So long as Leander and Nagy continued to sing, it mattered not whether the husband wrote business letters to his wife or not, she could always keep herself informed of their doings. She knew that in September they would be in Berlin and so she determined that Paris would be the center of her campaign of masterly inactivity. She had her own ideas of Leander's deepest soul. She thought she

knew it much better than he did and she was going to make an experiment in discovering it to him. So one day in September Mrs. Harley Manners gasped for breath when she saw Helen passing in state along the Avenue de Bois de Boulogne in her car. Mrs. Harley Manners was riding modestly in a taxicab, for she was in Paris for only a few days on her way homeward from a most exciting sojourn in St. Moritz. She was accompanied on this occasion by Mlle. Madeleine Piroux, who was singing in a special season at the Opéra Comique.

"Am I dreaming?" asked Mrs. Manners, "or was that Mrs. Baroni who just went by?"

"You are quite awake, my dear Mrs. Manners," answered Madeleine with a faint smile. "You have but just arrived in Paris or you would have heard of the coming of Mrs. Baroni."

"Is Mr. Baroni here?"

"Oh, no, he is singing in Berlin for the moment. Later he goes to Copenhagen, Stockholm, and St. Petersburg. It is to be a brilliant winter season in Russia."

“What! Doesn’t he sing in New York this coming winter?”

“Can it be that you do not know this? It is impossible. It was doubtful even when he started for South America, and while there he came to his decision.”

“I am out of the world,” moaned Mrs. Manners. “But tell me about his wife.”

“It is given out that she does not wish to travel all over Europe and that particularly the climate of Russia is not for her. Accordingly she remains here. She has taken a splendid house in the Rue de la Faisanderie. She has a corps of servants, two automobiles, and her special courier. She has engaged a famous master of cuisine as chef and a Swiss hotel proprietor as major domo. It is said that she will establish a grand salon.”

“But she cannot live alone in Paris and do this.”

“She is not alone. She has brought with her a most estimable aunt, who is sixty, ugly, and exceedingly correct, but who speaks the most marvelous French.”

"I wonder," said Mrs. Harley Manners musingly.

"You wonder what?"

"If she has an aunt. I never before heard of this sudden aunt."

"Nor I, but must we hear of all aunts, you and I? Besides, what matters it? In the world of Paris, if Mrs. Baroni is brilliant and interesting and brings the right people together in her house, she will have no difficulty. All will be well. Here one must be amusing, interesting, or astonishing. That is all. But she has the key to all doors."

"Yes? What key is this, my dear Mlle. Piroux?"

"I do not know how it has happened, but there can be no question that she is acquainted with the necessary persons. She has the *entrée* of the houses of the old nobility and of the Republicans. She has been seen already with the Minister of Education and with the head of one of the oldest Bourbon houses. They seemed to be friends of hers. She is on the right path, be assured."

Whereupon Mrs. Harley Manners decided that she must at once try to arrange to start for New York on a later steamer, and in the meanwhile she must write a note to dear Mrs. Baroni asking her to luncheon.

For some reason which she could never quite fathom dear Mrs. Baroni was always otherwise engaged, and Mrs. Harley Manners had to embark at Cherbourg without having expressed her personal approval of Mrs. Baroni's new departure in life. The last time the industrious seeker after musical celebrities saw the tenor's wife she was riding up the Avenue des Champs Elysées with the American ambassador, a personage whom Mrs. Harley Manners herself knew only by sight. And it had been only the previous day that she had beheld Mrs. Baroni in the act of taking tea at the Paillard in the Pré Catalan with a certain Archduke who was celebrated as a physician. At the same table sat a distinguished French painter and an Italian archæologist.

Mrs. Harley Manners had succeeded in attracting the attention of the tenor's wife, and

had received a most gracious smile, which was at the same instant a dismissal, so that she had not dared to approach the eminent tea-table. When the tenor's wife went up the noisy Champs Elysées with the Ambassador she did not even see Mrs. Harley Manners. So on the day before her enforced departure for Cherbourg Mrs. Harley Manners, abandoning all reserve, hastened to call upon the charming Mlle. Madeleine Piroux in her piquant apartment in the Rue des Petits Pois. Happily the soprano was at home with her faithful Ponitzky in attendance.

"It is most heartrending," declared Mrs. Harley Manners; "but I must positively sail the day after to-morrow. My husband will not exist any longer without me."

"Paris will miss you," said Madeleine. "But it will not be long before most of us are back in New York."

"You will not come before November, I suppose."

"No, but it is only five weeks away. I shall be almost on your heels."

"And I at your feet," added Ponitzky.

"But in the meantime," Mrs. Harley Manners hastened to say, "you will be good enough to take pity on a poor benighted New Yorker, will you not? Write to me, my dear Mlle. Piroux, and tell me all the news and gossip of this adorable Paris; say that you will."

Madeleine understood perfectly what was expected of her, but she had not the slightest objection to gratifying the wish of this volatile and superficial woman, who after all had her use in that dreary and prosaic New York, whither one was pitilessly forced to go for so many months to get the imperial dollar.

"Yes, of a certainty I shall write to you, my dear Mrs. Manners, and you shall know everything that you can wish to know."

"You are assuredly the sweetest thing," said Mrs. Manners, rushing forward and dabbing kisses on Madeleine's carnation cheeks. "Good-by, and as soon as you arrive in New York remember that you and M. Ponitzky are to dine with me at once, at once, remember."

And she vanished still gushing like a mill-dam. Madeleine smiled at Ponitzky.

“Droll creature, is she not? And most droll when she tries to be like a Frenchwoman. It is amusing.”

But the little soprano remembered her promise, and it was not long before all the Manners circle in New York knew the wondrous stir which the tenor's wife was creating in Paris, a stir which was much larger by the time it reached New York via Mrs. Manners. And when the various members of the opera company returned to Gotham for their season they all had something to say about Mrs. Baroni and her doings. As for the tenor himself, they said little enough, for none of them liked him. His free and frank manners had always been offset by his unconcealable egotism. Of course in a community of egotists each member finds a hostile force in each of the others, and there is no other community of egotists so thoroughly self-centered as an opera company.

It was gratifying to those who had friends in New York to tell them about the remarkable

career which the American woman was making in Parisian society. She had begun by showing herself in public places in the company of people of political, artistic, and scientific fame. The natural outcome was that all Paris was soon telling about her and the sporting set, which inevitably numbered many of the old and idle aristocracy, showed an inclination to take her up. But she would have none of it. She clung to the intellectual aristocracy, which is, after all, the highest aristocracy of France, and she found an *entrée* into certain houses of the old Faubourg where only the cream of the world can go.

It is perfectly true that the Americans in Paris were chagrined by the success of this woman, wholly unplaced in American society. They marveled at her reception. If they had only possessed the secret of the beginning they would have marveled still more. Helen had reached Paris armed with only two letters of introduction. That which opened the world to her was written by Dr. Silas Mabon, the distinguished chemist, and it was addressed to one of the forty immortals,

who chanced also to be the scion of one of the oldest houses of France.

It was not long before the news of Helen's new departure reached her husband. He and Nagy had completed their Berlin engagement and were singing a "guest" performance in "Carmen" in Dresden. They were sitting in a rather gorgeous apartment on the first floor of the Hôtel Bellevue, an apartment in which yellow and blue satin brocades vied with one another in riotous German splendor. Leander had just received his letters, forwarded from Paris, and among them was one envelope which contained only clippings from newspapers. These were paragraphs of social news recording the doings of Mme. Leandro Baroni, wife of the distinguished tenor, now traveling in Allemagne. He read them thoughtfully, and, folding them up, was about to put them in his pocket, when Nagy said:

"Press cuttings, my dear? Who is singing in Paris at this time of the year?"

"Oh, these are not about singers," he answered evasively.

"You may as well tell me all about it now as later, Leander. You know you are going to tell me."

Leander gazed steadily at her for a few moments. He seemed to be taking stock of her attitude toward him. It had come to be one of quiet possession and assured control. He wondered just how much further it would go. Then he took up the clippings, unfolded them, and blowing a thin spiral of blue smoke from his cigarette, said:

"These cuttings, my dear Nagy, are about my wife."

"Mon Dieu; so she has become a public woman, has she? What line has she gone in for?"

"It seems that she has established a brilliant salon in Paris, even at this untoward season of the year. I fancy that when every one has returned, she is going to be something of a figure."

"Ah, a Récamier from Fifth Avenue. She should make a success in at least one phase of the character."

“What do you mean?” asked he.

“Récamier’s success was largely due to the fact that her temperament prevented her from being assailed by scandal. I suppose, too, that when the right time comes that delightful little Studley will be ready to play the rôle of Chateaubriand. But she will not refuse him, as her predecessor did.”

Leander made no answer. He sat with his eyes fixed upon some far distant scene which his imagination had reconstructed for him. There was a strange look in those eyes, the look of a man who has discovered something and found it painful. Nagy watched him for a few moments and said to herself:

“That was a mistake of mine. He remembers the hours when the temperament was permitted to reveal itself. Those American women, they are not so cold as they seem. They are the children of their own Puritan ancestors and they must always act like the Puritans. But they are not cold. They are only slow, that is all. I must make him forget.”

Nagy had already begun a process of education. She found Leander an apt pupil. Faculties which had merely lain dormant began to awaken and to work vigorously. He had never known the poignant grip of beauty upon the soul. He had cherished the blind American habit of treating æsthetic emotion as something of which one should be ashamed. He had walked through miles of European picture galleries in his earlier days and made flippant comments on masterpieces. He had declared that cathedrals were nothing better than exaggerated stone heaps. He had gathered joyfully to himself some one's description of statues as "stone dolls." He had regarded the Alps as shade producers for luxurious hotels and the Adriatic as a good bathing resort. But already, under the tutelage of Nagy's brilliant mind and palpitating love for the physically beautiful, he was beginning to enjoy.

"Come," she said suddenly, "we are going to motor out to Pillnitz and dine there. You shall show me the beauties of the sunset on the Elbe and I shall show you the soul of Nagy Bosanska."

Leander smiled. He laid a hand on her shoulder and lightly kissed her hair.

"You will show me your soul, Nagy? Do you think you have kept much of it hidden from me in these months we have been together?"

"My friend," she answered in a mournful voice; "when I first took you to myself, you could not have seen even the outline of a soul, even if you and it had been alone in the world. You see now perhaps the outline, but nothing more. Of Nagy Bosanska you know only the beauty of her body and the might of her love. But she is for you still a Sphinx and you will never read her. Yet you may perhaps know a little more than you do now."

"Shall I ever know all, Nagy?"

"No; when you know all, you will leave me. I shall no longer enchain you."

"Nagy, you are very wise, but you are also a fool. I shall adore you always."

Yet even as he said it his thoughts reverted to his wife and her salon, and he wondered how she had contrived to rise to the surface of that glitter-

ing sea of Paris. He wondered how she had developed into a force. He did not dream that it had all been accomplished out of a woman's resolution to show her husband that she was greater than his mistress. But Nagy had divined it in an instant. The war was on. At Pillnitz Nagy was determined to win her first victory.

CHAPTER XVIII

“**Y**OU cannot know the soul of Nagy Bosanska,” said the Hungarian.

She was watching the roseate tints of the declining day dancing in the ripples of the Elbe. She sat opposite Leander at a table on which was the finale of their dinner. She smoked her cigarette, and a few solemn Hausfrau eyes looked upon her with disapproval. Two American women, with the title “tourist” stamped upon them, gazed at her with vulgar curiosity and made remarks about her in strident tones. Like most of their kind, they fancied that no one else understood their language. Two or three Germans of the better type spoke of her confidentially, and a Polish Jew in the corner stared at her with distended eyes. He was the only one who knew her. But Nagy was accustomed to public attention. She had merely taken the precaution to see that no one was close enough to overhear her con-

versation with Baroni and she spoke to him in Italian.

“ I am not sure that I know this soul myself, for it has soundless depths and elusive spaces. But I know much more of it than you know of yours. I have really lived, Baroni, not merely painted a life out of my vain imaginings. I have known joy and sorrow. I have eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge and have known the difference between good and evil. I have looked it squarely in the face, my friend, and have not blinded myself with a foolish picture, fashioned after the conventions of those who dare not think. I have lived the almost unknown life of an honest woman, who lies to no one, not even herself. I have done what I have done because it was my pleasure to do it, and I have not had to comfort myself with cowardly excuses. I have never sold myself to any man, as your virtuous American maidens do when they marry millionaires. I have never been the mere slave of a man whom I hated, as some pious women are because it is wicked to obtain divorces. I have boldly lived the life that

nine-tenths of the women of this world would live if they had the courage to shatter the barriers of convention which men and priests have set up for them. Goethe was a poet indeed when he wrote 'The woman soul leadeth us upward and on.' This is nonsense. Where, in every instance but one in ten thousand, is the woman soul? Shamed, crushed, trodden into the mire, every instinct of sex and self-respect outraged by forced obedience to some convention of a world utterly sensual and utterly dishonest about it. The only true woman is she who is free of all restrictions, who gives herself as she will, when she will, where she will. All others are shameless and nameless, my dear friend. And the soul of Nagy Bosanska is not the soul of one of those. It is clean and honest and strong because it has always been free, because it has looked good and evil squarely in the eyes."

Nagy paused and gazed again at the rosy lights growing to a deeper crimson on the river below them and Leander fell into a deep thought. A vague unrest had been awakened within him, an

undefinable something which moved him, but which he could neither place nor name. He groped blindly till Nagy's voice again claimed his attention.

"I remember a fragrant hollow in the palms of the brown mountains. All around it rose the sheer and rocky heights, like the outer walls of the world; but it was filled with the laughter of sweet waters, floored with a velvet of soft green and roofed with the gentle shade of dark-limbed trees. There we dwelt, my father and mother, my brothers and sisters and I. My father went often away and was long gone, but he always came back with plenty. We stayed there for months, but at length the gipsy spirit could rest no longer. Then we tramped weary miles up and down the great mountain passes. But we always found resting places where we remained for months at a time. I do not know whether it was this life that fashioned my soul. I do know that I, too, tramp up and down the passes of life, rest for a time in green valleys, and then press forward again.

"Well, let all that go. The time came when

I joined in the open air festivals of my people. I was the maddest of all the dancers. The wine of the Czardas flowed in my veins. None so languorous and melting in the lassu as Nagy, none so swift and flame-like in the friss. And then I began to play upon the cembalon and the guitar and to sing. And soon it was said that in all the Hohe Tatra there was no voice like that of Nagy—not Bosanska—I had another name then.

“ All went well enough till my father, eager to get money, took us all to the borders of the Lake of Csorba. It was there that Ferencz, a gipsy, fell in love with me. I remember him because he was the first who told me. I am sure now that there were others before him, but I did not know then what was the matter with them. I accepted Ferencz’s love without any question, because I wanted it. It was mine and I took it. I know now that it was the one great love that I have ever had. I know now that I loved him. But I was a fool then, because I was only a girl, and girls know nothing about anything. Sometimes girls really love, but they do not know it. Some-

times they think they love when they are only excited by vanity. Men do not know love till they are at least thirty. Women cannot even dream what it is before they are twenty-five. And I am only twenty-seven now. Then I was seventeen. It is a thousand years since then, and I am immortal.

“ Well, at Csorba are hotels, and though we remained in the mountain above the lake, the visitors found us out. At least one did. I was singing and my voice was floating away out over the lake. Suddenly a man broke through the bushes. He stared at me. I stared at him. He was not young and he was ugly, but his face had power. I was afraid of him. He told me that my voice was worth a fortune. Shall I tell you all that he said? It is not worth while. I fell under the spell of his power. I thought I loved him. In a week he carried me away secretly to Vienna to study, and also to be his mistress. Ferencz shot himself at the door of my empty tent. I did not know it then. I was still a girl. I knew nothing. I only wished to enjoy, to revel

in the splendors of the new world which had opened itself to me, and in the passion of this man of strange power. The intendant of the first opera house in which I was asked to sing made love to me and I laughed at him. Then my master—for that was what he was—beat me. Yes, Leander, you need not start like that. I, Nagy Bosanska, have been beaten like a dog and have cringed before a man. But he was a devil. He wished me to sell myself. He said that only thus could I succeed in the theater. That is why when my education was completed and I could sing as you have heard me and speak six languages and had steeped my mind in poetry and art, I stole out one black night alone and left Vienna. I did not know what I was going to do. I meant only to escape from that devil. And I did. I found a train going southward over the Semmering. I went to Venice and thence further southward and at last I came to Palermo, and there I paused. I sought an interview with the musical director. I was beautiful. He received me. I could sing; he listened. He made love to me. I laughed at

him. He was dazed and he engaged me. I changed my name to Elena Tataria. I kept that name while I remained in Palermo. It was after I had left that city that I read in a newspaper of the death of my former tyrant. Then my heart no longer shook within me. I resumed my own given name, Nagy, and added Bosanska, for I am a Hungarian patriot, and I will have no name that is not of my own soil."

Nagy paused once more. The sun had long before passed below the hills. The lambent twilight of the north was filling the sky. Here and there lights winked in the windows of distant houses. Boats moving on the river cast black shadows. Waiters turned on electric lamps in the darker corners of the terrace. Crowds surrounded Nagy and Leander, but the wise oberkellner saw that none came too close to them. He had learned from the Polish Jew who Nagy was and he foresaw trinkgeld in marks, not pfennige. Leander ordered allasch for himself and the soprano. Then she continued with her story.

"I shall not bury you under all the details of

my life. But this I will tell you. I have studied myself. I am a thing of flame, as a true gipsy should be. I am blown hither and thither by the wind of circumstance. I sometimes smolder and sometimes blaze, but I never die. I have sounded all the depths of human passion and I have fathomed the meaning of the human heart. And always I have turned from it to Nature. You, my dear Baroni, have never learned to be a part of creation. You dwell by yourself, shut up within the narrow walls of your own ego. You are all-sufficient. That is why you are not an artist."

Leander moved uneasily in his chair and seemed about to speak, but Nagy checked him with a gesture.

" 'Oh, Providence, vouchsafe me one day of pure joy! Long has the echo of perfect felicity been absent from my heart. When, oh when, oh, Thou divine one, shall I feel it again in nature's temple and in man's? Never? Ah, that would be too hard! ' "

These extraordinary sentences flowed out in

Nagy's deepest tones. Leander stared at her.

"Surely, Nagy, those words are not your own," he said.

"No," she answered, reverently inclining her beautiful head, "they are Beethoven's. Note, Baroni, my friend, he unites nature's temple with man's. Beethoven was an artist. He knew that the education of a soul must be sought in the study of nature and life. You have studied neither. You have not even seen them. Your eyes are turned inward. You see only Baroni, and only the surface of that."

"You are rather hard on me, Nagy," he said with a deprecatory smile. "I have seen *you*."

She laughed aloud.

"My dear Baroni, I have already told you that you have seen nothing except my surface. I have seen your soul. And I have taken a fancy to save it. For it is in deep peril. The soul that sleepeth, it is lost. When I began to sing I sang as you do, with my voice. I had no difficulty in getting success that way. But I cared nothing for success. I cared only for my own joy in living.

I was battling always with a sorrow, like the great master, Beethoven. Even I, the poor singer, suffered the pangs of disenchantment. First of all, I woke to know that I had thrown away the priceless jewel of a real love, a love which would have changed the whole nature of my life. If I had become the wife of Ferencz, I would have stayed in the mountains and would never have learned the horrors of the world. I could never have learned that men are satyrs and women Delilahs. I would have borne children and obeyed my lord and master Ferencz and kissed his knees for love. I would have dwelt in the pit of ignorance, but I would have had the love of the only man who ever saw my soul; for he did see it. And we two would have grown together to be as great as the old Pagan gods and the earth would have been our garden. All that I threw away because I was a girl and a fool when 'I saw the vision of the world and all the wonder that would be.' But the soul of Nagy Bosanska was not born to perish. Alone it has triumphed. It has grown. I have lived. I am a power."

Leander smiled one of his indulgent smiles. He enjoyed hearing Nagy boast of this mysterious power, although he could not comprehend what she meant by it.

"It seems to me, Nagy," he said, "that I have the advantage of you. I, too, am a power and the world is at my feet and I suffer nothing."

"'By solemn vision and bright silver dream
His infancy was nurtured. Every sight
And sound from the vast earth and ambient air
Sent to his heart its choicest impulses.
The fountains of divine philosophy
Fled not his thirsting lips: and all of great
Or good or lovely which the lovely past
In truth or fable consecrates he felt
And knew.'"

Nagy chanted the lines in flute-like tones and fixed a Delphic gaze on Leander as she did so.

"What on earth is that, Nagy?" he asked.

"Some lines from a poem by one of your English poets, Shelley by name. Read 'Alastor,' Baroni. And better still, read Byron's 'Manfred.' I am both. Both should have been women. Men do not feel as they felt."

"Nagy, you talk wonderfully. You ought to write a novel."

"Novels are written by babblers, and read by children. But life is not a fairy tale. And now I tell you once more that you will awaken. Give me your hand and cross my palm with silver. The gipsy will read your fortune."

"Oh, come, Nagy, that's all nonsense, you know," he said, laughing.

"Scoff not at that which you do not understand. Do as I bid you."

Still laughing, he drew a mark from his pocket and placed it in her palm. She looked swiftly at his hand and then gazed intently into his eyes.

"I see a storm. The strength that is sufficient unto itself will be shattered, but out of the wreck will rise another strength, which will be as great as the faith of a child, and it will rule. I, Nagy Bosanska, the gipsy, have spoken."

There was a moment of intense silence between them, while Leander felt vaguely the throbbings of some strange power within him. Then Nagy

leaned back in her chair and burst into a low ripple of exquisite laughter.

“Come,” she said; “let us go. You are still a fool, my friend.”

They rode back through the soft, starry September night almost without a word. Nagy, profound, Delphic Nagy, permitted her spell to work. She knew that the revelation which she had made had powerfully affected her lover. He was sunk in thought. Ever and anon he glanced furtively at her and in the glance were passion, adoration, wonder, worship. Nagy read the swift glances in the dim light of the stars. She knew that she had drawn him closer to her with a new and fervent interest. She was certain that the victory was hers. His feeble curiosity in regard to his wife would vanish. He would go forward to St. Petersburg, not back to Paris.

* * * * *

Helen waited in vain for some sign that her campaign in the French capital had yielded her a victory. When she read of the continued public successes of Leander and Nagy, she knew that she

had lost. But later she fell a prey to a consuming hunger to see her husband's face, to hear his voice once more. And when the time had come, she traveled southward.

CHAPTER XIX

A WINTER'S snows cover the workings of many strange forces of nature. Among other things which can develop in the dark months are the impulses of a human heart. Leander and Nagy sang together in Berlin and then traveled northward into the land of the Little Father. The splendors of St. Petersburg were new to them, but they conquered that capital just as they had conquered others before they saw it. The brilliant and amiable Russians made much of them. They went to Moscow and stood in the low-vaulted chapel where Ivan the Terrible had sat in the dark corner and marked his victims and where Napoleon had afterward slept. They heard the wondrous music of the great choir in the Church of the Annunciation. They saturated themselves in the marvels of the Tartar city.

And perhaps it was here that something began to develop within Leander. He knew not what it

was, but for some reason the words of Nagy began to have a new meaning for him. He was continually lost in amazement at the breadth and depth of her learning. In St. Petersburg she spoke to the people in the streets in their own language. In the Cathedral of St. Isaak she told Leander the significance of the text of a mass. In Moscow she explained to him the Oriental architecture. She went out into the country with him and she told him what the peasants were saying and doing. Belated once in a driving snow, she directed their driver to stop at a small inn by the roadside and entered without hesitation a grimy, smoky room, peopled by low-browed, sulky-looking peasants. It was plain that they resented the presence of the two aristocrats. Leander did not like the appearance of things, but Nagy smiled and addressed the peasants.

She called them little brothers and asked them if they knew a certain fable of Kryloff about a swallow and the wolves who fed it when it was hungry. They declared that they did not. They knew all the fables of Kryloff, but they had not

heard this one. Thereupon Nagy told it to them and they figuratively took her to their hearts, called her little mother, and vowed she should have all that was in the house. And so she and Leander were feasted. And afterward she asked for a balalaika and when they brought it to her, she played her own accompaniment while she sang them a wondrous song about the Kamarinsky peasant. When she and Leander drove away, the peasants shouted blessings after them.

“How comes it that you knew one of their own fables which they themselves did not know?” asked Leander after the inn was far behind them.

“Oh, sweet innocent, there is no such fable. I invented it for our need.”

“And you know the fables of Kryloff so intimately that you can imitate them well enough to deceive Russian peasants! Nagy, you’re a wizard.”

And so day after day the influence of this unique nature worked upon Leander and insensibly he began to respond to it. It was in Moscow,

too, that he began to perceive that his mind had focused itself upon a strange, if somewhat intangible notion, to wit, that there was something in the public estimation of Nagy different from that in which he was held.

At first he rejected the thought as preposterous. Then he temporarily comforted himself with the reflection that people naturally bestowed more attention on a beautiful and seductive woman than on a man. This theory quieted his mind for a long time. He said to himself:

“Of course Nagy does sing admirably, but it is not so much her singing as her temperament and her beauty that set the house afire.”

But in the course of a few weeks Leander found that this comfort also was denied him, for he had a strange and indefinable feeling in his own breast when Nagy rose to some of her most tempestuous outpours of dramatic expression. Leander would not admit it in words, but he was swayed by the artistic force of the woman. And then he suddenly asked himself a pertinent question:

“ I have been singing with Nagy a long time. How is it that I never felt this before? ”

And that question he could not answer, for he had not yet learned enough about self-analysis to perceive that it was his own slow and secret spiritual growth which enabled him to see things hitherto hidden from him. Nagy's work was beginning to bear fruit. The sleeping soul was approaching its hour of awakening. And so through all the winter months the work went on. The germs of spiritual force, which had so long been dormant in Leander, began to vitalize under the snows of a Russian winter. The tenor began to have new and strange moods. At times he would shut himself up in solitary reflection. These periods were short at first, but gradually grew longer. But each of them was followed by a mood of tumultuous energy. The waves were rising in the stormy spirit.

When the Russian engagement had ended the two singers journeyed slowly southward. It was in April that they appeared as guests in a few performances at the Teatro San Carlo, Naples.

Leander's restlessness had grown and Nagy was studying him closely. Sometimes he plunged into wildest passion, as if seeking to steep his soul in oblivion. Again he became cool and restrained in demeanor. Nagy, like Venus in "Tannhäuser," strove to weave anew the spell of her enchantments. And he, like Tannhäuser, would from time to time seize his spiritual harp and sing her praises. But the ice was becoming thin and Nagy had a faint cold fear at her heart, for even as Venus deeply loved Tannhäuser, so she had come to love Leander.

Their first appearance together was made in "Tosca." Here, of course, the great glory of the evening fell to the soprano, but there was a singular burst of emotion through the house at the opening of the third act. Leander sang the recitatives apathetically, but when he came to the cantabile, the first words, "Oh, dolci baci, o languide carezze," seemed to open some secret spring in his soul. For the first time in his entire operatic career he did something more than sing the air with tonal perfection and exquisitely finished

nuance. He published its meaning. He became really eloquent. The house rang with plaudits. He seemed unable to comprehend the reason. He sank back into his former apathy and finished his rôle mechanically. He nearly ruined the duet with Nagy by reason of his icy coldness. The Neapolitans almost shouted "Bah" at him. If he had not been Baroni, they would surely have done so, but they forgave him because his phrasing was perfect.

Leander went back to the hotel after the performance quite tired out. "Tosca" had wearied him. Two nights later he was to sing Don José to Nagy's Carmen. The very thought of it almost sickened him. He wondered if he might not be suddenly indisposed. Then in an instant his egotism began to push itself forward. Why should he not sing? Nagy had been enjoying all the success. As Don José he was at his best. He would sing. He would triumph over Nagy, especially in the last act. He would show her that he, too, could have temperament when it was necessary. He smiled as he thought of the splendors

of his voice and style in the flower song. Yes, in Don José he would teach his mistress a lesson.

He was early at the theater. He did not see the assembling of the audience. The Piazza San Ferdinando and the Strada San Carlo were crowded with equipages and pedestrians. The nobility and the proletariat jostled one another in the streets. The boxes and the galleries were packed. The fame of the interpretations of the two forestieri had spread through the town, despite the honorable endeavors of the local musical journals to convince every one that only Italians could disclose the real contents of Bizet's work.

The first act went with a fine vitality. Leander had an excellent companion in the Italian Micaela and the duet was beautifully sung. The applause was tumultuous. Nagy gained no more for her Habanera. She was happy, for she rejoiced in Leander's success. He told her that he rejoiced in hers. He lied. He had a canker at heart, something that he could not explain. The curtain rose on the second act. More people had entered the house. Certain persons of distinction who

always went late had come to occupy their boxes. The dance was intoxicating. Nagy flung herself into its closing measures with all the sinuous grace and abandon given to her by her gipsy nature. To her it was but another form of the friss of the Czardas. The Escamillo was a shouting Italian, who tore the Toreador song to tatters to the inexpressible delight of the gallery. Everything went with a swing till Nagy had hurled the inevitable chair up the stage and pitched the accouterments of the discomfited Don José at him, bidding him to begone. And then Leander poised himself for the triumph of the flower song. Nagy sank into a seat and he bent over her as he let the opening measures flow from his throat in those entrancing tones which had mastered two continents. And at this moment he looked past Nagy into the lower box on the right of the stage and full into the eyes of his wife.

The phrase which he was singing broke in two in the middle. He felt his breath rush from him in a sharp, convulsive gasp. He made a desperate effort to regain control of it. A fiery red cloud

rushed before his eyes. He threw his hands over them. He hurled his diaphragm upward with all the strength of his will. No sound came. He heard strange indefinable noises in the house. They sounded like hisses and execrations. There is no audience in the world so swift to proclaim its opinions as that of San Carlo. Leander straightened himself up. He dragged his gaze away from that marvelous, proud, beautiful face, which had burst upon him like a vision from paradise. The next instant the fiery red cloud blinded him and blackness followed it. He fell prone upon the stage in a faint.

Wild confusion followed. The curtain was rung down and Nagy strove with her own lovely hands to gather him into her arms. Men hurried upon the stage and the tenor was carried to his dressing-room. A physician was summoned. A quick examination showed that nothing serious had befallen the singer. A touch of vertigo, that was all, the physician declared. Oh, yes, he would assuredly be able to finish the performance. Leander, who had recovered his consciousness by

this time, looked up and smiled. Something of the bulldog feeling of college days came back to him. He murmured:

“ I shall finish. No fear that I shall not.”

Nagy bent over him with cooing words, but he quietly waved her away. The stage manager went before the curtain and told the audience that the great Signor Baroni had unfortunately been attacked by vertigo, but that in a few minutes, a very few minutes, he would be able to continue the performance. If the highly honorable signoras and signors would kindly be patient, it would be well. Meanwhile Leander had whispered to his valet to clear the room. The physician had done all that he could, but there were still several persons in the little space. Leander wished to be alone. Every one went out except Nagy. She of course remained. Leander sat up and took a drink of brandy. Then he gazed at Nagy with a long, thoughtful gaze. She returned the look with melting eyes. Leander studied the eyes as if they were some strange freak of nature which had never before come within the sphere of his

experience. Nagy was suddenly conscious of a cold feeling at heart. Leander rose.

“Come,” he said, “let us go and finish the act. We have played our little tragedy out to the end. Now we must play that for which the audience is waiting.”

They returned to the stage. The curtain was raised again. The audience applauded wildly. The orchestra resumed at the beginning of the flower song. And this time Leander sang it to the end, but as he had never sung it before in all his remarkable career. Not once during the delivery of the song did he look into the eyes of Nagy, but always past them into that box on the right of the stage. And there was something poignant in the quality of his tone, something which seemed new. When he sang the last words, “Lo schiavo suo, Carmen, mi fe,” he was still looking past Nagy into that box. Helen sat erect and just a trifle pale. When Leander had fallen, she had turned swiftly to the Duchess of Fiesole, whose guest she was, and said some words. An attendant had been despatched to the stage with an

inquiry and the answer had been reassuring. The act ended in a storm of applause. Leander appeared with Nagy time and time again to receive the approval of the audience, but he would not look into her face. Nor did he look into the box. Now that the lights were turned up, he stared with a fixed gaze into the center of the house. When the recalls had ended, the tenor dropped the hand of his associate, turned his back upon her, and walked quickly to his dressing-room to change his costume for the third act. But Nagy was close upon his heels. Panting and flushed, she made a swift sign to the valet, who slipped from the room, and left her alone with Leander.

"You are a master to-night, my friend," she said.

Leander, who had not noted her movements, wheeled and confronted her with glowing eyes.

"You devil from hell," he said in tense, low tones; "it was you who led me away from my faith."

"Your faith, my dear Baroni? Really, that is something of which I never heard before."

"If you value your life, don't try sarcasm with me."

There was something in his eyes that made Nagy for the first time shrink from him. But the flaming little gipsy had not bowed her spirit before a man's since she trembled before the man of power who beat her. She bravely smiled up into Leander's face and murmured:

"Mon ami, I mean no sarcasm. I love you."

"You love me! You!"

"Yes, I. Dare you hint that I do not? I have taught you to see your own soul."

"My soul! Great God!" he cried. "I have a soul and where is it? What have I done with it?"

"You are ungrateful, my dear Leander. Do you regret that you are now wiser? When I took you to my heart you were a block, a dolt, a blind, dumb thing that knew only itself. You have made some progress, but you are still only at the borders of discovery. You are as a little puppy that has just opened its eyes and seen the glare of the

sun. You are dazzled by new thoughts. You are——”

“Silence, you Jezebel! I am what I am, and much of that is what you have made me. You prate to me of soul. But you have wound round me the damnable bonds of sense. You have made of me a slave of desire. You have steeped me in the passion of the flesh. But at last I see myself as I am. I am ashamed to the heart's core. I cry for liberty. I will have it!”

“‘Tannhäuser, Act I, scene 1,’” said Nagy bitterly. “You wish to go back to your pale and holy Elizabeth, my——”

“Damn you!” he cried; “don't you dare to speak of her. She is not for us to discuss. I am shut out of her life and well you know it. You have done that. But I shall be out of yours, too.”

Nagy gazed at him intently. Could it be that in awakening his soul, which was so assuredly stirring to life, she had robbed herself of his passion? No, he was not ready for that. She raised her face with a great yearning upon it and said:

"Baroni, I love you. You have no right to speak to me as you do. If I took you, remember that I also gave myself."

"As you had done a dozen times before," he interrupted bitterly.

"Generous words, are they not? But I forgive. I shall not give you up."

"Go, go!" he cried; "you cannot keep me."

He thrust her from the room and slammed the door behind her. With feverish fingers he tore open his garments and began to change his costume for the third act. His dresser, finding that the soprano had departed, returned to help him. He began the act in a mood of perfect composure. He was dimly conscious of that strange new power which he had lately felt within him, but he could not grasp it, he could not define it, he could not control it. He only knew that something above and beyond him was urging him, he knew not whither. Until he found himself facing Nagy in the last scene of the act he was coldly imperative in his treatment of the rôle. His struggle with Escamillo had in it something of contempt. But

when he once more saw Nagy, this time in the habiliments of a gipsy which sat upon her with native grace and deviltry, his wrath again rose within him. The people on the stage started in astonishment at the new timbre which his tones assumed when he delivered the line:

“ ‘Ah! bada a te, Carmen, stanco son di soffrir.’ ”

Still Nagy lived in her rôle and her pitying glance at Micaela was equaled by her affectation of scorn of Don José. But the torrent within Leander burst its bonds when he rushed down the stage and seized Carmen by the throat, forcing her to the ground and thundering in her ears the words:

“ ‘E forzare tisapro
A subir la sorte ingrata
Che due vite insiem lego.’ ”

He shook Nagy as if she were a leaf and almost flattened her face against the boards of the stage. She cried out in choked tones with the pain he inflicted. The people on the stage started for-

ward, for they saw there was something more than acting. They understood that an intense tragedy of real life was exhibited in its last agonized scene. They dimly felt that here was something greater than the familiar liaison of the opera house. There was something strange and potent and appalling in the relation between this Hungarian, who came of a race of lawless men and women, and this American, who was an illegitimate son of a nation of money grubbers. The house was aroused to extravagant demonstrations. Across the footlights it looked like a brilliantly realistic piece of acting and the audience was astonished at the vigor of the hitherto cold Americano.

But Nagy was not deceived. Crushed, disheveled, breathless, she knew that her dominion over him was gone forever. She had tried to show him his soul and he had begun to see the light.

CHAPTER XX

WHEN the curtain had fallen on the final scene of the most remarkable performance of "Carmen" within the memory of Neapolitans Leander tore off the rags of the costume, and breathing a profound sigh, said:

"That was my last Don José. I shall never be able to sing the accursed part again."

He left the theater quickly and alone. Nagy might find her own way to the hotel or to Avernus. He wished only that he might never again look into the baleful green eyes or scent the seductive perfume of her raven hair. She had a horrible mastery of his senses. He knew it, and yet he felt that the hour of his liberation had come. Nagy had spoken much of souls. She dreamed of a love in which the perfect agony of physical passion would be united to that celestial mingling of spiritual natures which poets sang. Leander knew now that this was the only real love, that this

was the greatest thing in the world, the thing which raised men to heights beyond those occupied even by angels. And he knew, too, that he was unfit for it, that he had been as Tannhäuser, wallowing in the miry depths of sensuality. Freedom, freedom! That he must have. And yet he hesitated to face Nagy alone in their apartments at the hotel.

The night was soft and mild and a young April moon swam in the whitecapped billows of an indigo sky. It was warm and grateful air that sang sweetly out of the hills. Leander hailed a cab, an open one, and told the cocchiere to drive him out to the Trattoria Pallino. Leander had no fear about entering the strictly Italian resorts at night. He knew the people, their language, and their customs. And on this night he wished to be where none of his adulators would discover him.

A score of people were in the place when he entered. He was not recognized. He sat in a half-dark corner and ate his supper silently. Thought hounded him, keen, cutting, aching

thought. He saw again the pure lines of that noble face which had gazed at him out of the Fiesole box. He realized how he had brought shame and sorrow upon Helen. He knew that she had given him a love more splendid than anything which could ever enter the much-vaunted "soul of Nagy Bosanska." He knew that she had bestowed upon him a grand passion which his undeveloped spirit had not known how to comprehend. But now it was too late. He had placed between her and himself an impassable gulf. She had said that she would take no action, but that was only the resolution of the first hours of her desertion. Doubtless the time would come when she would be eager to obtain her freedom. Perhaps she might find consolation in that newspaper fool. He seemed to be a great friend of hers.

Well, whatever she did, it would be right. He, Leander, certainly had no more claim upon her. She had not been able to enter into his artistic sphere and he had not grasped the beauty and bliss of her self-effacement in the love she gave him. It was well as it was. He would continue

to go his way and she would go hers. And then he broke down and hid his face in his hands. For he knew that in spite of everything he still loved her, and would have given his soul to have her again at his side. He lifted his head, for he was dimly aware that the Italians were watching him furtively. He called the waiter.

“Ho mal di testa,” he said; “il mio conto.”

He paid his bill, and, with a polite “Buona sera ” to the assembly, left the place. He rode slowly back to his hotel. He hoped that Nagy had by this time retired and would be sound asleep. He stole into his own room, which was separated from hers by a small salon. He sat down and smoked a cigarette. Thought still burdened him. He knew not what he ought to do. His mind was in a confusion. His spirit was shaken to its center. He undressed and got into his pajamas, turned out the lights, and stood looking out into the moonlit night. He could see the dim outlines of Ischia away out on the sea line at his right and the rugged back of Capri looming on the left. Here and there a shadowy sail

showed where the night fisherman was at his toil.

"Out yonder peace, peace," murmured the tenor, as he leaned against the casement.

He heard a sound as of a gentle sigh near him, and, turning, saw the figure of Nagy in the center of his room. He stared at her and caught his breath. Then he said in a low, hard tone:

"Go back to your own room."

"Not till I have said a word to you. My friend, you were very brutal with me on the stage to-night, but I forgive you, for you were annoyed."

He remained silent, gazing at her coldly. She could feel the chill of it.

"You are unhappy, are you not? But you did not mean all those things which you said to me at the theater to-night. You called me a devil. You said that I had put your soul in torment. You were vexed; but you did not mean all that."

"I meant every word and every act," he said in the same hard tone.

Nagy shivered. The conviction which had come upon her at the end of the third act of the

opera that she had lost her power over him assailed her with renewed force. But she would make one more struggle. She stretched her arms out toward him and moved slowly forward, with the sinuous undulations of her beautiful form only half hidden by the slight drapery which she had thrown around it, and laid her hands upon his shoulders. Then she drew herself to him till she was so close that her breath fanned his cheek, while she murmured:

“Leander, my love, my love, if I have given you any suffering, let me try to atone for it. You must, you must. It is my right. It is the right of my great love for you.”

The tenor stood quite moveless and his hands remained folded behind his back. He looked at her calmly and steadily, though within him there still rose from time to time faint waves of that old thirst of the blood, which had consumed the dry dust of his brain and transformed the once gentle current of his veins into fire. But he moved not an inch toward her. He regarded her ivory arms and her swelling bosom with unflickering

eyes. He knew perfectly now that what he had felt for her was not a real love.

“Go back to your own room, Nagy. You are fighting against the inevitable. I cannot speak to you as I would, but it is your due that I should at least try.”

He paused a moment as if gathering his forces for the last blow, and then in the same low, cold, hard voice he continued:

“I believe that you speak the truth when you tell me that you have loved me. I am shamed by my own knowledge. You have not made me suffer, Nagy, but I must make you. I must confess that I have never given you what you have given me. I have taken, like a man, all that you laid before me. You have done for me more than any one did before you. You told me many, many wonderful truths. I was asleep. You awakened me. You have led me through marvelous paths, into splendid heights. But now I am in the valley and the way is not plain. But one thing I do know, and that one thing I must tell you. It is the only honest thing I have done,

Nagy, when I tell you that I have never given you what you have given me. I have loved your beauty, I have gone mad with your passion, but I have only been a primal savage man, Nagy, and it is all over. I am sorry; I wish I were worthy of you, but I am not. You are a thousand times better than I am. I tell you only the ugly truth when I say that now I have nothing at all to give you. Everything is ended. I have no longer the right to look upon your beauty. Go back to your own room."

With an incredibly swift movement she glided backward several feet and gathered her draperies about her as if they closed the world between him and her. She stood a moment like an antique statue. Then with a dry sob she wheeled and passed into her own chamber. Leander slowly turned once more to the window, leaned against the casement, and looked out upon the night and the sea.

"Out yonder peace, peace," he said.

Before the next evening the news had spread through Naples that Signor Baroni's indisposition

of the previous night had proved to be sufficient after all to put an end to his activities. He would sing no more that season. In fact it was said that he had already left the city on a steamer of the Servizi Marittimi bound for Constantinople and Odessa.

CHAPTER XXI

“OH, really, it is quite too much for any one to endure,” declared Mrs. Harley Manners, as she purred in her seat at the first general rehearsal of the season. “You know, I have always disliked having a Monday night box, for that society set will not tolerate any of the great artistic works. But, of course, you know, what is one to do? It was always the night on which that adorable Baroni sang, and one just simply had to hear him, you understand. So I have always had my Monday night box, and so, don’t you see, they keep it for me from season to season, and what am I to do? I naturally have to take it. But I can’t endure that society set. They are such stupid people. They have no real culture and no ideals at all.”

Philip Studley listened to her with commendable patience. Mrs. Manners had passed through many experiences since the memorable autumn

when she had returned from Paris, dazed at the sudden blaze of Mrs. Baroni's glory. Less than a week after she had reached home, her husband had quietly curled up in his morning bath and passed out of existence by the quick route of heart disease. Mrs. Harley Manners found herself a not altogether inconsolable widow, with a substantial fortune entirely under her own control. A year had passed. Mrs. Harley Manners had threaded her way discreetly, but with some agility, through the various phases of mourning, and had emerged a gentle dove of exquisitely graduated black and white. At the opening of the season there were even hints in certain not too conspicuous corners of her costume that crimson roses would soon bloom again.

"I am sorry to hear such bad accounts of the society set from you," said Philip. "But, of course, it is no news. Your statements only agree with what others have told me, and what I have picked up myself from a few unexpected meetings. But you see, we social pariahs rather laugh at the attitude of these money lords and ladies.

They have no social position except what they buy. And they can't buy their way into all the worlds, you know. Did you ever notice how seldom an American heiress catches a German noble?"

Mrs. Manners sat up and stared. No, she certainly had not thought of that.

"But American society people are received in the finest houses in France," she said.

"Yes, received," said Philip, with meaning; "but they never lead, as they do in London."

"Your friend, Mrs. Baroni, seems to me to be a good deal of a leader in Paris."

"Mrs. Baroni was never in society here. She belongs to a set which looks upon our so-called society with quiet contempt. I never saw any of them at her house in Paris."

"Why, have you been in Paris? When?"

"I was there for a short time last spring, just after Mrs. Baroni returned to Paris from Italy. She was not very well for a few days. She gave some brilliant entertainments, to all of which she did me the honor to invite me. Then un-

expectedly she closed her Paris residence, and went to the north. Now she has returned to New York."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Harley Manners. "I am certainly out of the world. I did not know any of this at all. I must call on her at once."

"I am afraid you will find some difficulty in seeing her. She is keeping herself in the greatest seclusion."

"Is she not in good health?"

"Oh, yes, perfect. But while her husband is singing in the East, she does not feel like going out."

Mrs. Harley Manners ruminated. It was a very lame explanation, she thought. But murder and social gossip will out, as she well knew, and so she had only to wait. When the rehearsal had moved its wearisome progress as far as the beginning of the second act, Philip quietly departed. He had an engagement of which he had naturally made no mention to the vivacious Mrs. Harley Manners. He was to meet Helen at the Holland

House for luncheon. She was waiting for him when he arrived.

"Philip," said she when they had finished their first course, "I want you to tell me where Mlle. Bosanska is stopping."

"My dear Helen, did you ask me to luncheon only to make that important inquiry? You could easily have found that out at the opera house."

"I do not desire to have any one know that I have made the inquiry. That is why I make it of you."

"My dear Helen, of course. She is not at her old apartment this season. You will find her in a new one on the other side of town. I heard of it myself only yesterday from our man who covers the musical news."

And Philip told her the number and street.

"I am going to call on her," said Helen in a calm tone.

"I beg your pardon, Helen, but you ought not to do that, you know."

"On the contrary, it is the very thing I must

do. I do not know where Leander is, and his agent here will not tell me. He firmly but politely declares that his instructions are to give no information to any one, not even me."

"Well, I'm blessed! But do you think Mlle. Bosanska knows? Was there not a story of a quarrel between them in Naples?"

"There undoubtedly was a quarrel, and he left the city, but she followed him within a week. I am sure she knows where he is, and I think I have a right to know."

"Do you write to him?"

"I have written to him; there are important business matters; I have sent letters to his Paris address. I have had no answers."

"But what good can come of your going to Mlle. Bosanska? Let me go for you. Oh, no, I forgot. She would laugh at me. Can't you send, or, better, why not write?"

"I am going to see her, to look her in the face, to talk to her."

Philip gazed with some astonishment at Helen. There was a ring of power in her voice. She had

risen as if to meet an emergency. That same afternoon she arrived at Mlle. Bosanska's apartment. The maid told her that the singer was lying down, and could see no one.

"Go and tell your mistress that I shall wait till she gets up," said Helen, and the maid hurriedly went. Presently she returned and bade Helen enter the salon and be seated. In a few minutes Nagy, clad in a loose peignoir, entered.

"Madame," she said, "I need hardly apologize for appearing in this costume. You could not have expected to wait till I made a toilet."

"I am satisfied to see you as you are, Mlle. Bosanska," said Helen. "I am here to ask you a pointed question, a very strange and humiliating question, but I must do it. Where is my husband?"

Nagy started as if she had been struck full in the face.

"My God!" she cried with anguish unmistakable in her tone, "I do not know!"

"You do not know?"

"No. Do you suppose that I would lie to you now? I do not know where he is. I know that he is lost to me, and that I still love him."

Helen rose from her seat, pale and trembling.

"You do not hesitate to tell me, his wife, that you love him?"

"Why should I? You know that he and I have been together; but surely you did not think me a thing of the gutter! You may be a proud woman, Madame, but your pride is no greater than mine. I gave myself because of the joy I found in giving."

Helen walked across the room, endeavoring to grip herself well before answering. When she felt that she could speak steadily, she returned and faced Nagy.

"You and I, I fear, cannot stand upon the same ground in this matter. I am willing to believe that, as you say, you gave yourself for the sheer joy of giving. So did I. Perhaps that has not occurred to you."

"Oh, yes; I believe you think you love."

Helen smiled, and for a few moments remained silent in order that Nagy might, perhaps, gather the full significance of her next words.

“ Can you or any other woman do more than think she loves? Are you any surer of your love than I am of mine, because you know that when you gave yourself to my husband, you knew it was not for life? ”

There was a keen and stinging significance in the last clause as Helen uttered it in her clear cool tones, and Nagy's face flushed.

“ How do you know that? I did not think of it! I just gave myself without any thought except that I loved him, that I wanted him, that I wanted passionately to belong to him, and that I knew that he needed me.”

“ And, Mlle. Bosanska, when I gave myself to him at the altar, and pledged myself before God and man to cling to him in life and in death, to be one with him through all that this world might bring to us, I did it wholly and utterly because I loved him, because I wanted him, because I wanted passionately to belong to him, because I knew

that he needed me. And when I gave, I gave myself to be one woman for one man, never to be touched by another, to be sacred to him, body and soul, to be sealed to him by a love which I knew was to die only when I die."

Nagy stood quite motionless. Her face revealed astonishment. She had not thought that the calmly poised patrician American could have such feeling.

"You American women cannot understand such a passion as mine," she said defiantly.

"That is where you are mistaken, Mlle. Bosanska. You yourself are a marvelously delicate and responsive human instrument, but you make the error of thinking that other instruments are not responsive, because they do not disclose everything. But accept my word for one thing, that the love which I cherish for my husband contains everything which makes love noble and sacred. There is no such thing as a great love without a great passion. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, Madame, I have more respect for you than I had. But how is it that if you had this

splendid passion you could not awaken your husband's soul?"

Helen turned away. This, indeed, had been the question of her own life. How had she failed? She could not answer. Nagy laughed aloud and threw herself upon a couch, sitting proudly as if she were a queen.

"That was reserved for me, Madame. I found what was hidden from you."

"How, how?" Helen asked the question eagerly before she had time to reflect.

"That ought, perhaps, to be my secret, ought it not?" said Nagy maliciously.

"I grant you that. And I am going even further, Mlle. Bosanska. I am going to tell you that if the quickening of his soul is to be preserved by the influence of your love, I shall accept a continuance of the situation which began when he went to South America with you."

Nagy lowered her eyes. She was trying to shut herself up within her own spirit in order to fathom the precise significance of this attitude on the part of Helen. It would never have occurred to Nagy

to give Leander up to another woman for his own sake. Presently she shrugged her shoulders and rose from the couch.

"You are a fool," she said in her customary blunt way to Helen, "but you are a great woman. But it is all too late. I have told you that I do not know where he is."

"Am I, then, to understand that your relations with him are really broken off for all time?"

"You must have known it. You saw him faint on the stage in Naples."

"Yes, he had an attack of vertigo. It was nothing."

Nagy stared at her as one who could not believe her own senses.

"Madame, your husband fainted because he saw your face in a box. He repulsed me from that instant. He refused to remain with me. He fled from Naples. He was as a man awakened from a dream. He was no longer under my sway. His spirit, which I had aroused from its slumber, had grown too strong for me to control. But he dared not look you in the face. He fled from

both of us. I do not know where he has gone. But of one thing I am sure, and that is that he is not happy."

"He repulsed you?"

"He spurned me—not in hot anger, but in cool thought. He even thanked me for what I had done for him."

Nagy's bitterness in saying these last words was intense. Helen was lost in astonishment. Leander had broken with the Hungarian. Then the quarrel was because he had looked into her own face. He was shamed, yes, that was it. But that was not enough to account for everything. However ashamed he might be, he would not have abandoned Nagy for that reason. They would have gone together. They could always sing together. There was not an opera house in all Europe which would not welcome them. Helen stood silent in profound reflection. Then a light slowly dawned in her eyes. She looked at Nagy, who was watching her through those half-closed lids. She walked up to the Hungarian and grasped her by the arm.

"He has ceased to love you?" she whispered.

"I will tell you what no other woman could have influenced me to tell. I will tell you, because you shall see that you have been a blind fool, a senseless creature, holding in the hollow of your hand a great, sleeping heart, and not knowing what to do with it. Leander never loved me. He told me that, and then fled."

Helen released the gipsy's arm and threw her hands over her own eyes.

"I am not too late, I am not too late. He does not love her."

She uncovered her face, and for a moment the two women stood gazing searchingly at one another. Then Helen held out her hand.

"Au revoir, Mlle. Bosanska. Perhaps, after all, I am your debtor."

Nagy ignored the hand.

"Au revoir, Madame," she said. "Try to make more of your opportunities."

And Helen departed, still ignorant of Leander's whereabouts, but with a new feeling of sweet hope in her heart.

CHAPTER XXII

A MAN of tall stature, bronzed by exposure to the summer sun, was standing in deep contemplation on the ragged summit of the Tengerszem-Csucs. From his eyrie more than eight thousand feet high he gazed silently upon the stupendous panorama spread below him. Little shining lakes, laughing streamlets, noble pines, mighty rocks, and broad expanses of billowing grass made the imposing picture. The man was clad in a walking-garb, for he had tramped many miles through the enchanted region, filled with gipsy lore. He had pondered on many things. His beard had grown straggly, and his eyes had sunk under his cleanly marked brows. Now he had climbed up from the shore of the Lake of Csorba, refusing the help of a guide, and was resting while he held commune with his soul.

A great change had come over him. The smiling, confident, uplifted face of Leandro Baroni

had taken on a new expression. The proud challenge of his eyes was gone. In its place there was a great introspectiveness. He was as one to whom the whole exterior world contributed new ideas. He himself was hardly conscious of the extent of his development. He nursed a secret sorrow, of which the chief basis was self-accusation. But of the effect of that sorrow upon his own personality he was not wholly aware.

When he had fled from Naples he had gone into the seclusion of a little town, Salo by name, on the west shore of the matchless Lago di Garda. There he had stayed under the strange spell of a crushing numbness. He had felt as one stricken by a heavy physical blow. But the enchantment of the vineyards and the sunny days had slowly melted him. He had turned his face to the north. A fussy little steamboat, squat, puffing, grimy, and crowded with grimy, squat men and women, had carried him to Riva, and thence a rocking and bounding little railway train, stifling with its own smoke, to Mori. With hardly any definite aim, he moved still to the north, but the wistful call of

Bozen halted him. And there the eloquence of the mountains for the first time reached his soul. He went up in the inclined railway to Oberbozen. He had no clear purpose in going, but the oratory of the portier at the Kaiserkrone fairly drove him to the journey. And there he saw Rosengarten, that grand prince of Dolomites, with its crown of auburn flaming into rose-red in the rays of the sinking sun. He sat on the terrace of the little hotel and gazed at the picture. He had seen mountains often, but only with the external vision. They had been pleasant to look at, effective variations in rock and snow, but had said nothing to him. Now a strange influence worked upon him, and he became absorbed. A waiter hovered around him, and with a start he realized that he was doing something unheard of, occupying a seat in a restaurant and asking for nothing. He ordered coffee, and when it had been placed before him, he forgot it.

“What is it?” he asked himself. “Why should that massive shoulder of the earth, springing square against the liquid sky, move me with

an emotion? What is the emotion? Why have I never known it before? What has happened to me?"

He watched the colors turn dull on Rosengarten. He stayed at the little hotel to take his dinner, and it was on the last train that he went down to Bozen again, and back to the Kaiserkrone.

"The Herr has enjoyed the visit, not true?" said the portier. "It was well that I spoke of it, was it not?"

"I shall remember your excellent advice when I am leaving," said Leander.

The next day he started for Vienna. He had a conviction that in the Austrian capital in the summer he could escape the eyes of acquaintances. He had allowed his beard to grow, and he had become richly sunburned. He dressed himself inconspicuously. He took lodgings in an obscure hôtel garni, and ate in restaurants not frequented by the tourists or the people of the musical world. He spent his time chiefly in the libraries and art galleries, and endeavored to recover habits of study laid aside since university days, but it was

not easy. The mind, accustomed to facile methods, balked at honest labor. But the strange new force, which was at work within him, drove him mercilessly. He shut his teeth and bowed himself over his tasks. He was trying for the first time in his life to grasp the meaning of Art. He was trying to find out what were the real purposes and principles of it. He gathered to himself all that seemed likely to throw light upon it, from Plato to Nietzsche. He slowly regained the elasticity of his mind. Then he read omnivorously and swiftly. And slowly the scales fell from his eyes.

“I have been blind and deaf, and I had better have been also dumb,” he said to himself. “I have thought myself great when I was but a child’s rattle. I have had fine titles for my doings. I must first of all learn to swallow the words of Zarathustra: ‘Let thy virtue be too high for the familiarity of names; if thou hast to speak of it, be not afraid to stammer.’ Ah, even that is not enough. First I must try to acquire some virtue. Where? How?”

And so it came about that the restless desire of his spirit sent him once more into the mountains, and, as if by instinct, he wandered into the Hohe Tatra, and to the border of that lake beside which Nagy's first lover had shot himself at the door of her empty tent. Here he came finally upon a revelation of the meaning of Nagy Bosanska in his life. Upon this he pondered again and again, and as he stood upon the summit of the Tengerszem-Csucs, he was thinking of that marvelous woman.

"Oh, the wonder of it all," he thought; "the wonder of it! How was it that she and I sang together season after season, and yet the firewood lay cold upon the hearth-stones of life? Then without warning the torch was applied, and this great and glorious spirit gave its immortal flame to mine? Nagy said that Goethe was nothing but a poet when he wrote that the woman soul leadeth us upward and on, but he spoke eternal truth. And now I know that without her, she whom most of the silly creatures of a blind world would call the incarnation of Kipling's Vampire, I never

could know and never could understand. It was Nagy who boasted that she would awaken my soul. I was a blind man, and suddenly the sun fell upon my sight. And I saw a vision. I saw the face of the one woman. It smote me to the earth. It was Nagy who had led me to the height from which I could see. I have lived in a dream. Helen, my wife, was right when she told me that I was possessed of self. And the furnace fires of an earthly passion have burned away this dross from my soul. God forgive me; I am as a thistle blown by the wind. But the future shall be different."

And he went down to Csorba's shore again, and there he met Karl Zichy. It was the next afternoon, and Leander was musing in the depths of the woods. Without thought he began to sing, at first softly, and then more loudly. He sang from memory and imperfectly "Wie bist du meine Königin." He seated himself upon the trunk of a fallen tree, and fell again into thought. He did not hear a light footstep near him, and looked up in surprise when a low voice addressed him.

"Pardon me, but was it not you I heard singing?"

Leander saw before him a short spare old man with a seamed face, and deep, searching eyes, set under a broad high forehead. It was a face which indicated power and thought. Leander was less ready to repulse his fellow men than he had been. He answered gently, but with some reserve:

"You are right; I did venture to sing. I thought I should not disturb any one here."

"I should not say that I was disturbed, but rather interested. You were singing Brahms, but—pardon me—not quite correctly."

"You are right," responded Leander with a smile. "I have never studied the song. I was only trying to recall it from memory. I once heard a woman sing it marvelously."

"I have never heard any lieder singer deliver it marvelously."

"This was not a lieder singer, and she would not sing it in public. She sang Brahms only in private. She was an opera singer."

"There have been two great opera singers who could also sing Brahms," said the little old man; "Sembrich and Lehmann."

"I do not mean either. I speak of Nagy Bosanska, the Hungarian soprano."

"You know our Nagy Bosanska?" said the old man. His glance kindled and his head was proudly lifted.

"I have heard her sing 'Wie bist du meine Königin.'"

"Pardon me. You interest me much. Will you allow me an old man's privilege? I am called Karl Zichy. I was a protégé of our great Hungarian conductor, Seidl. I have lived much in the atmosphere of Bayreuth, where the name of Brahms is not spoken. But I have also lived much in Vienna. I am that strange thing, a musician whose two gods are Wagner and Brahms. Possibly you will bear with me further if I say to you that you have a wonderful voice, and that you sang like a singer."

"I am a singer," said Leander slowly and heavily; "just that and nothing more."

"Pardon me yet once again; but if you know this, you are already something more."

"I stand on the borders of knowledge, that is all."

Leander relapsed into silence, and seemed to have lost himself again in his musing. But presently he looked up and saw that Zichy was still standing there, regarding him closely.

"You have said that you grew up in the atmosphere of Bayreuth," said Leander. "Would you be willing to discuss some Wagnerian subjects with me?"

"Willingly, since you are interested in them."

They dined together that evening, and in the reflective period of the after-dinner cigar Leander said:

"Mr. Zichy, I am hiding here under my real name, Lee Barrett. It may be, however, that you will not know my stage name. It is Leandro Baroni."

Zichy smiled, and, leaning forward, studied the tenor's face closely.

"I have heard you sing twice, Mr. Barrett,"

said he; "but you do not resemble the Romeo or the Don José whom I saw."

"I ask you now," continued Leander, "whether your engagements are pressing for the present."

"I have none at all."

"Then will you take me as a pupil? I wish to study the great dramas and the great German songs. I find in you the mind which can lead mine."

Zichy gazed at him thoughtfully for several seconds.

"It will be a great opportunity," he said softly. "Mr. Barrett, I will enter into a contract with you gladly. I believe that you can become very great."

"I do not wish to be great any more," said Leander, shaking his head; "I have suffered too much of that greatness. I desire now to be an artist. I have come to see that the creator is he who is great, not the interpreter. But I have learned that I have a solemn duty to perform, and that this voice was given to me for the purpose of performing it. I have been unfaithful to my

trust, Mr. Zichy. But it is not too late. And a woman has shown me the way to the truth. She offered me the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and I did eat."

Zichy made no comment on this speech. He was too old and too wise to ask for confidences. He was well aware that in good time he would learn the history of Leander's spiritual life. So on the next day the two men started for Budapest, where they were to pass the winter in seclusion and study. Day by day Leander's respect for the aged Hungarian grew. Zichy was not merely a musician, but a philosopher and a scholar. He opened up to Leander the whole meaning of the Wagnerian drama. Before the winter had passed the tenor had read the great epics upon which Wagner built, and saturated himself with their poetic spirit. But his most rapt hours were those in which Zichy labored with him over the masterpieces of Schubert, Brahms, and the other great song writers. He felt that in them he would find basic truth. One day in January, while they were sitting by the piano,

Leander suddenly bowed his head as though ashamed to look squarely at Zichy, and said:

“I used to try to sing Lohengrin.”

Zichy made no answer, but waited for Leander to go on.

“And I was applauded enthusiastically for my delivery of the narrative in the last scene. Zichy, I think if one sang that rightly there would be no applause, only a great silence, as there is after the first act of ‘Parsifal.’ ”

“Perhaps, my dear Baroni, you expect too much of a facile public. But one, at any rate, should try to sing it that way.”

“When I sang it I was always thinking of my own success. Zichy, a woman told me that I was the slave of my ego, and I spurned her for it. But every day, every hour now I see more clearly that she was right in everything she told me, and that I was a blind fool, with my face against the mirror of my own conceit.”

“This woman of whom you have spoken to me was a great one. How is it that you left her?”

“I have spoken to you of two women. One

was my wife. The other was a glorious artist, a breathing incarnation of passion and self-forgetfulness, a flame of temperament, a pealing voice of universal expression."

"And it was, of course, this second woman who gave you of the fruit of the tree of knowledge."

"Which the other woman had offered me also, but from her I would not take it, because she was too great for me to understand. The artist taught me to comprehend, and now I know that I shall never reach even the feet of my wife."

Leander arose and tramped restlessly up and down the room, while Zichy sat by the piano and watched him. But presently an idea came to the aged musician, and he began to play softly the music prefatory to the narrative of Lohengrin. Leander stopped short in his walk, and at the proper instant began to sing softly:

"In fernem Land, unnahbar euren Schritten,
Liegt eine Burg, die Monsalvat genannt."

As he continued he sang with more tone, but always with a feeling of reverence, of aloofness

from his surroundings. When he came to the end, Zichy dropped his hands from the piano and said:

“I am sure that is not the way you used to sing it.”

“I do not think so; I hope not; I am not certain of myself.”

“We shall study it, and you shall learn to sing it always that way,” said Zichy, and then Leander knew that he had at last found the meaning of the scene. And presently Zichy spoke again:

“I am sorry that your voice is a little too high for Tannhäuser.”

“I am glad,” said Leander; “I do not wish to sing the part. I am Tannhäuser.”

It was in the month of June that the two men left Buda-Pesth and traveled westward.

CHAPTER XXIII

THERE was nothing new to Leander in Munich, yet everything was strange. He had walked through both Pinakotheks and the Glyptothek, and had loitered in the Schalk gallery in the unregenerate days when his thought was centered upon his own voice, but now, in the company of Zichy, he retrod the old paths, and at every step made discoveries. They spent two weeks in the Bavarian capital, and in that time Leander continued to expand. Not only did his intellect stretch itself and gather strength, but his heart continued to open and make room for the human side of life. And as it did so, he understood better and better the measureless breadth and depth of the hearts of two women. After the two weeks in Munich he and Zichy went to Interlaken and saturated themselves with the early summer splendors of the Jungfrau. Leander had removed his beard and restored himself as nearly

as possible to his former appearance. But still he escaped meeting acquaintances. And it was in Interlaken that a letter from his Paris agent found him.

"Zichy," he said; "I shall go back."

"To New York?"

"Yes, the Metropolitan is calling me still, and this time I shall not refuse. You will go with me?"

"Yes, if you desire it. I have never been in America."

"I desire it, and I need you. We have still much to study together."

In mid-July they were in Zermatt. And here Leander was seized with a great hunger to walk to the Gornergrat.

"My dear friend, this is not for me," said Zichy with a smile. "You will give me leave to go in the train."

"We shall meet at the Riffelalp," said Leander; "I shall abandon the walk there and ride with you."

For once there was no curtain of jealous mist

to shut the glories of the mountains from the sight of men. Leander set off early in the morning in a magnificent blaze of sheer sunshine. A brilliant pyramid of ivory, the frowning Matterhorn, boldest and strongest of peaks, stood out a dazzling spire against a sapphire sky and the Riffelalp Hotel hung clear and close in the transparent air on the heights above the village. Leander strode away, filled with the joy of living. The spiritual depression which had hung upon him for so long a time had left him. In that pure and holy atmosphere the mean dross of life shrank away. He sang in his soul as he climbed the slopes to the Riffelalp, which he reached before the middle of the day. The train followed close upon his heels, and Zichy dismounted. Then, when he had spied Leander, they secured seats together, and went onward to the Gornergrat. They stood in the very eyrie of peak and glacier. And as they stood, another man moved along the levels just behind them. They took no notice of him, for tourists were always plenty at the Gornergrat.

But this man saw Leander and started. It was

Philip Studley, who had arrived in Zermatt the previous night, and had hastened to the Gornergrat with the first morrow. He was astonished to see Leander, and still more so when he noted the indescribable, but unmistakable alteration in the expression of his face. He hesitated, debating whether he should advance and make his presence known. He decided that it would be wiser not to do so. He felt that, after all, he had no right to thrust himself upon the tenor's privacy. But he could not help watching the singer, and the conviction grew upon him that a deep change of some sort had taken place. He saw the venerable man with Leander speak to him, and he observed that the singer bent his head and listened with a deeply thoughtful air. Then he saw Leander catch up the thread of the conversation and stretch out his arm in a noble and commanding gesture. It was evident that the tenor spoke of the majestic scene upon which he and his companion were gazing, and it was equally plain that the younger man's eloquence was not without its weight for the older one. At the very

moment, when Philip was most absorbed in watching the two, Leander was quoting Zichy:

““Spirit of Nature, here!
In this interminable wilderness
Of worlds, at whose immensity
Even soaring fancy staggers,
Here is thy fitting temple.””

“ Whose lines are those? ” asked the old Hungarian.

“ An English poet’s, Shelley by name. A Hungarian gipsy taught me to read him.”

And Zichy knew that he was thinking again of Nagy Bosanska. Philip watched the two till they were ready to descend again to Zermatt. He kept himself out of their range of observation, and entered the train without being seen by them. He permitted them to leave the terminus in advance of himself, and took his way to his hotel without being discovered. In the evening he sat in his room, reflecting on the change which he had noted in the tenor. He attributed it to the sobering effect of experience, but inevitably failed to measure it at its true value. While he was thus en-

gaged in thought, there came to him the voice of a man singing softly, and he recognized the rich *mezza voce* of Baroni. He could not identify the song, because he could not hear enough of it. But he was certain that the singer was not far away. His curiosity was sufficient to cause him to try to hear more. He went to the window and listened a moment, endeavoring to determine the direction from which the tones came. He found that the tenor and his companion were sitting on a small balcony just below his window. He leaned out, feeling that, even if that singular sense which detects the propinquity of another person, moved either of them to look up, he would not be recognized in the dim light. The singing had now ceased, and the men were conversing in low tones. Presently Baroni's companion raised his voice enough to permit Philip to hear a sentence.

"You ought to give recitals. Your interpretations of Brahms should not be lost to the world."

"There is one who can interpret him far better than I," replied the tenor.

And then their voices sank again, so that Philip

could not distinguish their words. But he understood immediately that Leander spoke of Nagy. And he smiled a rather grim smile as he recalled his own endeavor to impress upon her the importance of her lieder singing. A few moments passed in silence, and then Leander began again to sing softly. The music drifted upward to Philip's ears, and his memory easily supplied the words, which were dear to him:

“‘Wie bist du meine Königin,
Durch sanfte Güte wonnevoll!
Du läch’le nur—Lenzdüfte weh’n
Durch mein Gemüte wonnevoll.’”

His memory brought back to him the deep passion of Nagy's delivery, and he found himself noting with amazement in the tenor's suppressed delivery a similar intensity, a wealth of color and nuance, which he had never heard in Leander's singing on the stage. He shook his head.

“A marvelous woman, that gipsy soprano,” he said to himself. “She has found the gateway to his musical soul and opened it. What if, in

doing so, she has changed the whole man? My dear Helen! It may be that he will yet come to see her true worth."

The next morning he learned that Leander and his companion had gone down to Visp on their way to the West. And later in the same day he read in a London newspaper in the hotel reading-room that the tenor had accepted a new contract with the Metropolitan Opera House.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE Italian restaurant was reeking with its accustomed collection of odors. The waiters were sweating and the eaters were coiling spaghetti around their forks with the callous indifference of long habit. There was the familiar intermingling of persons belonging to two worlds—the artistic and the inartistic. There were long-haired painters with broad, limp neckties and exceedingly loose coats. There were lean and pallid magazine specialists, whose eager faces seemed to be peering into every corner in search of something to expose. But the most conspicuous persons were the little company of opera singers, of whom Madeleine Piroux and Ponitzky were the stars, while Tremontini and La Feramordi, supported by the judicious Abadista, believed that they were the real luminaries.

“Clever of our able impresario to hold off the

reappearance of Baroni till Wednesday night, was it not?" remarked Tremontini.

"It seems so," said Ponitzky. "Every one wishes to hear him again, but, of course, the Monday night houses are all sold out anyhow."

"But," interposed Madeleine, "that is not the reason at all."

"Ah," exclaimed Feramordi sarcastically, "then you tell it to us."

"I am going to," responded the adorable French soprano calmly; "it seems that he wished Baroni to sing Lohengrin on the opening night, but that Baroni was bent on making his reappearance in a new rôle, Tristan."

"Oh, well, of course he had to give him his way," said Ponitzky.

"Yes," said Tremontini, "but what on earth has possessed Baroni to take up German rôles? Is his voice failing, do you suppose?"

"Why, he always sang Lohengrin and Walther," said Abadista.

"Yes, he sang them in all three languages, but they are sung by every tenor in these days. But

when you come to Tristan and the Siegfrieds, it is a somewhat different matter, isn't it?" said Tremontini. "You know they tried once to get me to study that diabolical Alberich, but I drew the line at that. Wolfram von Eschenbach was quite enough for me."

"And where the deuce was Baroni all the time, anyhow?" asked Ponitzky.

"Well, no one seems to know. I have heard that he was in the Far East," said Abadista, who prided himself on knowing everything; "but there is no telling. Only one thing is certain, and that is that he disappeared from the surface of Europe and did not sing for more than a year."

"It was after his break with our divine Nagy, was it not?" asked Feramordi. "Really, she must have had a ruinous effect upon him."

"I wonder," murmured Madeleine.

"Have you been at any 'Tristan' rehearsals?" inquired Ponitzky of Abadista.

"Yes," he answered; "but Baroni does not sing. He merely mumbles. There seems to be a good understanding between him and Kraft."

"Well," declared Feramordi, "the whole thing is impossible. Baroni has the most beautiful tenor voice in the world, that is granted, and he has a perfect technique; but he has no soul and no intelligence. His Faust and Romeo were always pretty, but nothing else, and his Don José was ridiculous. Such a man cannot even suspect what is in Tristan."

"I wonder," murmured Madeleine again.

The astonishment of the opera singers over the announcement that Baroni would make his reappearance as Tristan was truly professional. It had its compensations, based upon a sweet and secret trust that all would be ill. Perhaps only Madeleine cherished a belief in the tenor. The others patiently and serenely awaited the hour of his downfall. They knew well that, as La Feramordi had said, Baroni's voice and exquisite tonal technique would carry him far, but they also knew that these would not carry him through the third act of the great Wagnerian love drama. He might manage to delude an audience in the first two; but in the third there could be no deception.

But what the opera singers felt in regard to the new departure was a trifle compared to what others felt. The opera-going public was deeply annoyed. For some years it had cherished the belief that here, at least, was one singer who would not be afflicted with the Wagner insanity, who would continue to make frequent the presentation of "Faust," "Roméo et Juliette," "Carmen," and "Aïda." Yet now, after having robbed them of his presence for two years, he returned with the announcement that he, too, was going to become a "Wagnerian interpreter." It was almost too much to bear. But still one really had to hear him, and, of course, it would be interesting to see him in a new costume, and with a beard—yes, people said that he would wear a beard in Tristan. Fancy Baroni trying to look like a sort of wild Norseman. Wasn't Tristan a Norseman? Anyhow, he sailed in a ship such as Norsemen used.

Helen, the wife, sat at home and pondered. She was troubled to her heart's core. She had believed that Leander's return to New York meant that he was returning to her; but as yet he had

made no sign. The publication of the news that he was to reappear as Tristan had moved her. She felt that it had a significance. She hazarded the guess that it was Leander's purpose to disclose in the beginning of his renewed labors at the Metropolitan that he had put away childish things, that he had found something more in his art than the glorification of Self. She dared even to think that, with the subjugation of his egotism to his art would come a renewal of his feeling for her, or, rather, that he might at any rate be willing to face duty. And so she sat and waited and waited, but nothing happened. Leander did not communicate with her directly or indirectly. But she was determined to be present at the performance of "Tristan und Isolde."

At the last rehearsal of the drama, Mrs. Harley Manners was among those present. She bustled from seat to seat in her customary brisk style, prattling vivaciously and saying all sorts of priceless nothings. It was not till after the first act, however, that she spied Philip Studley, who was rising from his seat to go out.

"What!" she said; "going away so soon?"

"Yes," he answered; "I thought that, perhaps, I might get a line on the performance from this rehearsal, so that I could get something up in advance, but Mr. Baroni is merely walking through the part, and not giving any clew to his impersonation."

"Oh, do you think that?" she said suddenly, almost breathless with a new idea; "I thought that he was doing it just as he intends to on Wednesday evening."

"No, I am positive that it will not be anything of this sort. Mr. Baroni has not been idle in the two years he has been away, especially the last year. He has been studying. I happen to know that. You will see that he has ideas."

"You amaze me," declared Mrs. Harley Manners. "I know that he sings divinely, but I supposed that it was impossible for him to sing this part. Indeed, only one man has ever sung it, you know."

"Yes, I know," replied Philip, smiling; "but I think we are going to hear the second."

"I am delighted. Of course, I am going to be here. You know, I never miss a performance of 'Tristan und Isolde,' and with Mme. Olbaum as Isolde and Mme. Massliebchen as Brangäne, not to speak of Herr Zollecoffer as Kurvenal, it is sure to be an interesting evening, even if Baroni is too—well, too nice."

Nagy Bosanska went to no rehearsals. She had nodded her beautiful head and smiled out of her sea-green eyes, when she read that Baroni would sing Tristan. She sat in the soft light of her apartment and communed with herself.

"And so the prophecy of Nagy Bosanska, the gipsy, is brought to its fulfilment by Nagy Bosanska, the woman."

She leaned back and laughed a little, and then there were tears in her eyes.

"The splendid Baroni! He was such a child when I took him away from his fool of a wife. And now he is a man, and he and I could rule the world together, but I have lost my power. And he will go back to the good domestic love, and be an honest breadwinner for his family. Ah, but I

talk nonsense. I know that I lie. I lie to salve my own wound. Baroni will be great. The gipsy has said it, and it is true."

Nagy had not come through it all unscathed. Fierce and fiery as her nature was, she was, in spite of herself, a woman. She had been sent into the world a born polygamist, and she had learned to look that hard fact squarely in the eyes. But the inspection was not altogether pleasing to her. She knew that the waning and leaping of the immortal flame within her, waning and leaping even as the flame on Hunding's hearth-stone, were more splendid than the soft glow of the farthing rushlight which guided so many excellent women from the altar to the grave; but, none the less, she had reached the period when she felt that life's wanderlust should be over. She would have liked to settle down to a somewhat wayward imitation of domestic existence, a finale of life composed in an *adagio*, but *appassionato*. Leander might have been the companion of this happy state. But here for once her insight had failed her.

She had dreamed that she would mould him to

her own ends, and he had risen to her level only to obtain a wider and keener view of his own personality. She had taught him her runes, even as Brünnhilde taught Siegfried, and the result was that he left her. She had lost track of him in the year following their separation. If she had known that he had visited the Lake of Csorba and digested there the spiritual food which she had given him, she would have understood still better the impossibility of any future between them. For Nagy had the wisdom of a serpent, and she would have interpreted rightly that pilgrimage of Leander to the spot where her own strange life had begun. And if she had known all that, she would have interpreted much more accurately the new departure in his public career. She had prophesied that he would become great; but she did not know how much of humility he had acquired, how much of the simple faith of intellectual honesty.

As for Leander himself, he attended the necessary rehearsals and remained away from the opera house as much as possible. He went for long walks, and at other times buried himself in

study. Part of each day was spent at the piano with Zichy by his side. Sometimes they pored over passages in the score, striving to correlate them correctly with the drama as a whole, and again they read page after page in the prose writings of the master. All of this they had done over and over again in Europe, but there was scarcely a day in which Leander did not find more intimate revelations of the profound meaning of Wagner. And to convey that to his audience was his whole aim.

At any rate, he thought it was. Deep down in his heart there was an undefined purpose, which he would not have dared to fashion into words. He did not venture even to confront it, but rather strove to deceive himself as to its very existence. But every night when he was alone in his room, before going to bed he gazed long and intently at a small portrait of a woman which he carried in his pocket during the day. And, as he gazed, a great tenderness and worship would come into his eyes, and sometimes even a moisture.

When the eventful Wednesday evening arrived

the opera house was packed. Even the standing room behind the orchestra rail was crowded. It was a curious assemblage, but perfectly characteristic. Two-thirds of the people in the house were there to hear Baroni in a new rôle. Even the indisputable fact that he was going to sing in one of those long, dreary Wagner music dramas, in which he would not be able to lean over the footlights and hurl a high B flat at the gallery, even that tremendous and dispiriting fact did not suffice to keep the old Baroni enthusiasts at home. The other third of the audience was composed of all sorts and conditions of men and women, among whom was a fair sprinkling of real lovers of Wagner's immortal hymn of love.

Helen sat in the orchestra circle on the left, and not far from the stage. She had chosen a seat where she herself would be inconspicuous, but from which she could watch Leander's face. While the orchestra was playing the tumultuous prelude, she began to wish that she had not come. Tremors, first hot and then cold, pursued one another through her limbs. At moments she felt

faint, and her head swam. She began to realize all that this new departure might mean in its effect on Baroni's future success, and she was seized with a great fear. She clasped her hands in her lap so tightly that it pained her. She shut her teeth with grim determination. She must, she must know what this thing meant. Why had Leander essayed Tristan? And that was what she had to know.

The curtain rose, and the song of the sailor floated down from aloft. Helen did not even hear it. All her senses were crowded into a fierce eagerness for the first sight of Leander. She leaned forward in her seat, waiting for the cry of Isolde for air, when Brangäne would draw back the curtains of the tent and disclose the stern of the ship. And as she leaned forward a woman sitting in an upper box on the opposite side of the house also leaned forward and saw her. It was Nagy. And the bold gipsy, too, was pale and eager, and she, too, was holding herself in a mighty grip; for she throbbed with nervous anxiety for the man she had loved, and to whom she was

still drawn by a subtle power. She saw Helen, and caught her breath with a quick short sigh. She divined all that the wife was feeling. Helen did not see Nagy. Her eyes were fixed immovably on the stage. At length the organ tones of Mme. Olbaum pealed the cry for air, and the curtains glided back, showing the poop deck. Leander was an imposing figure as he stood on the platform. Motionless and portentous he was with his towering height and his broad shoulders. And his eyes had a wonderful look. Webster said to himself that they were like the eyes of Niemann.

"Looks well, doesn't he?" whispered the man behind Helen. "I didn't suppose that sentimental fellow could get himself up like that."

Helen stared at her husband, and a hot mist came over her eyes. She had not seen him for nearly two years, and in an instant she detected a change. She knew that it was a larger manhood that confronted her. With all her soul she listened when the Kurvenal said, "Botschaft von Isolde," and Leander opened his lips for the first words, "Was ist's? Isolde?" His tones were

equable, thin, cutting, his poise untroubled, his gaze unmoved. He was the incarnation of trained coldness. An imperceptible chill went through the house. It was the first grip of the new Tristan. Helen thrilled to her heart's core, for she recognized power. When the tent curtains were closed again upon the riotous outbreak of Kurvenal, she sank back with a slight feeling of fatigue. Leander had preserved that deadly and imperious coldness throughout the first scene. Even his golden voice had taken on a ring of steel. Helen hardly heard the great scene between Isolde and Brangäne. She waited for the entrance of Tristan. At length he came, slowly, almost majestically, striding between the opened curtains of the tent, while under Kraft's magic the orchestra sang the tremendous measures of the entrance music. What had happened to Leandro Baroni? People all over the house were beginning to realize that this incursion into a new field was not something to create the idle chatter of a passing hour. Baroni looked every inch the mighty hero of the antique epic. But still that steely voice continued,

the expression of the spirit mightily controlled. Presently, however, came a profound, but subtle, change.

“‘ War Morold dir so werth,
Nun wieder nimm das Schwert,
Und führ es sicher und fest
Dass du nicht dir's entfallen lässt.’”

In these lines the color of the voice changed, and there was for the first time a shadow of vibrato. The iron Tristan had been moved. It was a little touch of something like genius. Those who could discern it sat up straight in their seats. Was this the old-time Baroni? Still more did the tenor open up the turmoil of the knight's heart when he accepted the proffered cup and prepared to drink what he believed to be a draught of death. And then followed the pantomimic agony of love's outbreak, the shattering of the bonds of honor. And with the long deep-breathed sigh of “Isolde,” Baroni suddenly let loose the whole richness of his vocal color, and chanted in one word something of the eternal mystery of passion which he had learned. Helen almost cried out when she heard that utterance. It was not the old self-conscious

Leander, but a new creation, an artist lost in the splendor of his art.

Still, the audience did not grasp the full meaning of it. The message of this Tristan was yet to be spread through all the house. With the second act there came an impression such as the Metropolitan had not known in years. Helen herself almost forgot for a moment that it was Leander to whom she was listening. The delivery of the duet, "O sink' hernieder," by him and Mme. Olbaum, was something never to be forgotten, but it was not then that this Tristan affected his hearers most. This was not far removed from the style of triumph which the great Baroni had so often enjoyed. But after the entrance of King Mark and the false Melot, then there was an utterance of such heartrending pathos, such a probing of the very bottom of the human soul, that men and women in various parts of the house were visibly moved. It came with that agonizing speech beginning:

"'Wohin nun Tristan scheidet
Willst du, Isold', ihm folgen?'"

Helen shook in her chair and struggled with all the resources of her will to master the mighty waves of emotion which welled up within her. She knew that there were people not far away who recognized her, and she would not have had them detect her feelings. She turned as pale as death, and when the curtain had fallen she went out into the corridor, and then out into the lobby, where she inhaled long breaths of cold air. Meanwhile the house was seething. Men and women were applauding, and the name of "Baroni, Baroni," rang through the place. But Leander's attitude was one of dignified modesty. His deference to the superb Olbaum, who had given the audience an Isolde fit to stand beside his Tristan, was marked. Finally the acclamations ceased, and people poured out into the corridors. There was a great buzzing of comment.

"Good thing for that fellow Baroni to go abroad and study a couple of years, wasn't it?" said one of the wise ones; "wonder where he worked."

"I hear he picked up some old beggar from

Bayreuth who used to be with Wagner," said the other, "and this old chap has coached him up in all this sort of thing."

"Well, a rattling good job, too, isn't it? You know he almost makes the devilish stuff interesting."

Helen managed to slip back into her seat, while the wise ones were talking to one another in the corridor. And then came the last act. And with it came the deluge. What Leander had done before was plainly seen to be preparation for this. Gaunt, hollow-cheeked, heavy-eyed, he lay upon the couch of pain and poured out the misery of his soul in such poignant accents of grief and despair as that hardened auditorium had never heard before. And when at last he sprang to his feet in the delirious vision of the ship, and tore the bandage from his wound, one vast sigh and shudder swept through the house. The piercing agony of his tones was almost more than the audience could endure. Helen fell back in her seat, and made no attempt to hide the tears which streamed down her cheeks. And then the death and the

sublime *Pax vobiscum* of Isolde, sung majestically by the great Olbaum. Men and women with one accord said, as they left the theater, that it was the greatest performance of the drama ever heard in New York, and that Baroni had proved himself to be the foremost heroic tenor in the world.

"Zichy," said Leander, when they were alone after the performance, "do you think they felt it, that they were moved by the drama?"

"My dear boy," said Zichy, swallowing hard and blinking his eyes, "I know they did. I wish the Master could have lived for this night."

"You think he would have been pleased?"

"He would have given his right hand to get such a Tristan."

For answer Leander suddenly dropped into a chair and shook with dry sobs.

"What is it, my dear friend? What is it?"

The tenor looked up with a fathomless sorrow in his expression.

"Zichy," he said, "I saw my wife's face for an instant to-night. My God! What have I done with my life?"

CHAPTER XXV

THE morning after the performance Leander awoke with a dull, listless feeling. After all, what did this spiritual progress bring him? He was fully aware that he had risen. He had thrilled through every fiber of his being on the previous night with the consciousness that he was at last a true servant of his art. But this morning he lay in his bed wondering if, after all, it was worth while. For, knowing that he had done something uplifting, that he had poured out all that was best in his resurrected soul, he still felt that his life was floating upon the wayward tide of a great helplessness. When he had risen and breakfasted, he sent for Zichy, who came, bringing the morning papers.

“Good-morning, my dear boy,” said the old man; “you are acclaimed, indeed, to-day.”

Leander put it all aside with a weary wave of the hand.

"What does it matter?" he murmured.

Zichy gazed at him thoughtfully. The aged musician understood the real cause of the tenor's trouble.

"Why do you not go to her?" he said softly.

"She would not receive me," answered Leander. "I have closed her doors against myself."

And that was all that Zichy could persuade him to say on the subject. It was a pity that the tenor could not see into his wife's new apartment in Central Park West. Unlike him, she had risen with the dawn of a glorious light in her eyes. She felt that something new and beautiful had come into her life. Leander was separated from her, but he had found himself. She knew that the old arrogant egotism had been quelled. In no other way could Leander have ascended the starry heights of art. While he was a worshiper of his own glory, he was only an opera singer. But now he was a master. What was to happen next? Helen had not slept well. She had tossed restlessly on her bed, and she was not ashamed to confess to herself that the cause of her restless-

ness was a passionate yearning for the man she loved. When she had dressed for the morning, her first impulse was to sit down and write him a note, telling him how glad she was. But her second thoughts drew her away from any act which Leander might interpret as an advance on her part. It would be a mistake. He would not wish her to humble herself. If he still cared for her, if the obliteration of Self had revealed to him the real value of her love, he would seek her again.

At noon Philip Studley called on her. She had no need to ask him what he thought of the interpretation. She had already drunk in his column of warm praise. Philip, keen to note every shade of expression in her tender eyes, saw the unrest.

"Helen," he said, "you have not reached your goal."

"What do you mean?"

"You need him, my dear girl, and I am going to add that he needs you. He will never be complete till he has rest in his heart, and it is surely not there now."

Helen looked thoughtfully at Philip and said:

“How can I be sure of that?”

“Tell me once and for all, Helen, have you any feeling now about his past relations with Mlle. Bosanska?”

“Yes,” she answered slowly and deliberately; “his intimacy with her was one of the greatest things that ever happened to him. It aroused his real temperament.”

“Then there should be really nothing in the way of a reconciliation.”

“How can I tell?” she said wearily; “I do not know whether he really desires one. Perhaps he will find spiritual repose better alone.”

Philip took his departure soon after that. He went to his club to luncheon, and there, after some deliberation, he came to a determination, and he wrote a brief note to Baroni. In it he said:

“You will pardon me if I take two liberties. First, I am going to add my personal congratulations to my professional comment on your genu-

ine Tristan of last night. Second, I am going to speak as the oldest and most intimate friend of your wife. She will be at home at five o'clock. She is not happy."

Leander read this note with a flood of confused emotions. For a moment he was disposed to resent the officiousness, as it seemed to him, of Philip, but with his new attitude of mind he soon realized that the man was, indeed, very close to Helen, and that for her sake he had a right to go far, if he thought it necessary for her welfare. Then a wild tumult spread through all his veins. He would see her, he would look once more into her eyes. Yes, he would do this at least, even if she again banished him from her sweet presence. She should at any rate know that he had at last learned to know her worth.

Helen was sitting in her boudoir, vainly trying to compose her mind. She had a strange sense of something big impending, and she was filled with tremors. But she knew not what it was that was coming to her. When the bell rang at five

o'clock, she heaved a long sigh and half uttered a wish that people would leave her to herself. The next minute a servant entered and said:

"Madam, it is a gentleman—really a gentleman—and tall and handsome. But he will not give a card or a name. He says only to tell you that he wishes to speak to you."

Helen rose and dismissed the wondering girl. For a moment she stood questioning the possibilities, but swiftly the certainty came to her that no one would approach her thus except Leander. With an effort she steadied herself, and presently, with all her forces well within her grip, she entered her drawing-room and saw her husband standing by the mantel. Both of them hesitated and trembled a little. Neither knew just what to do, but Helen gathered herself together. She smiled kindly and held out her hand. Leander took it softly in his own, which was as hot as fire.

"I am glad to see you, Leander," she said in a low tone. She was almost afraid to trust her

voice. "I was at the opera last night, and——"

"I saw you," he said huskily.

"I am astonished at that," she continued calmly, "for I thought there was too little light in the house. It was a great performance."

"It is a great masterpiece," he said; "no performance can reach it."

Helen's heart gave a quick throb. It was unspeakable delight to her to hear Leander use such words.

"I have learned something, I hope," continued Leander, "since I left y—New York."

"You have gained, indeed, very greatly," she answered.

"I have had several teachers," responded Leander. "First of all, the woman with whom I was. Helen, I should be less than a man if I denied my debt to her. She first showed me how small and mean I was, and led me to the gateway of Art."

"I shall thank her for it as long as I live," answered Helen, her voice sinking to a tremulous whisper.

Leander sprang to his feet. A flame of eager light had rushed into his eyes.

"You still care?" he exclaimed, "you still care enough for that?"

For a moment there was a silence between them, and then Leander fell upon his knees before her, and buried his face in his hands upon her lap. There, with his eyes hidden, he spoke rapidly and brokenly:

"Helen, I do not ask you to forgive me, because you will not wish me to do that, if you still have some affection for me. But I do ask you to let me come back to my place at your side, if not in your whole life. Let me strive to show you how I honor and reverence you, how I have learned to understand that in the early days of our marriage you were entirely right in every particular. I was, indeed, the incarnation of self, and because I was that I charged you with inability to comprehend me, to enter into my artistic life. I know now that I had not any artistic life, and that the only artist in our house was you, who thought great and beautiful thoughts,

and who would have led me to noble heights if I had not been a blind and obstinate fool. I had the paradise of a man's soul beside me, and I turned my back upon it and fled. I never knew how the change was worked in my soul, but that strange creature gradually awakened my spirit. And when it was fully aroused, I looked into the theater one night at Naples and saw your face. And then I knew that I had thrust myself out of paradise and that there was only one thing left for me in this world, to try to atone. I feared that you would never permit me to speak to you again, but you have done so, and you tell me you still care. I am not worthy to touch your hand, my dear, but you will let me live near you and try to show you that I do understand better? "

She did not answer, but he felt her form shaking. He slowly raised his head and gazed into her eyes. She gave him a sad look in return.

" You will not? " he said.

" I cannot take you on those terms."

She spoke slowly, and Leander bowed his head

again. He thought she would say more, but she was silent. Suddenly a great light broke upon him, and he looked up.

"Helen," he exclaimed, "I love you. Dear heart, do you not know that I have learned it? Do you not see that the supreme crown of all my revelation has been the full understanding of that? Oh, my dear, my dear, if you will but take up again the heart that never knew itself, it will be hereafter a shrine for your image."

Then she laid her two beautiful arms around his neck and drew his head to a pillow upon her heaving breast.

"Leander," she said in a voice which vibrated with passion, "have you never known that you are my idol? What do I want of atonement? I care nothing that another woman showed you the secrets of your own soul. I care for nothing but to lie in your arms, to be held close, close, close to your heart, to feel the eternal fire of your love glowing upon me, and glorifying me, to be yours, my husband, yours in flesh and spirit, to grow wholly one with you, to walk hand in hand with

you down the path of life to the gate of death, and, by God's will, to be with you in eternity."

And then he lifted his head and uttered a great cry.

"Helen, Helen, my wife!"

Their lips met in a kiss, a long, clinging kiss, such as Siegfried imprinted upon the lips of Brünnhilde when he woke her from the sleep of a goddess and led her to the triumph of womanhood.

* * * * *

On the following morning Leander was obliged to visit the office of the impresario. An humble appeal over the telephone had reached him. The great man spoke very gently, and the tenor tried to answer even more gently. Helen went with him, for she seemed unwilling to take her now glorified eyes off his face for a moment. When they were ushered into the bureau of the impresario, they found it unoccupied, except for one figure seated in a shadowy corner. The figure rose and revealed the great green eyes of Nagy

Bosanska, which regarded the pair searchingly for several moments.

"I perceive," she said at length, "that the prophecy of the gipsy has been fulfilled."

"I have been told," responded Helen in a gentle tone, "of that prophecy, and I believe its fulfilment came about because in the end the gipsy's witchcraft was so beneficent."

The two women gazed intently at one another for a moment, and the quiet, steady confidence of Helen's eyes was triumphant. Nagy's brilliant green orbs trembled as she said slowly:

"He will be a king among men, for you are a greater woman than I am."

The impresario entered and told Leander that he wished to give one of those seductive "special" performances, the opera to be "Carmen," with a star cast, including Nagy and the tenor. Leander looked at his wife, who smiled.

"I shall always be honored to sing with Mlle. Bosanska," he said; "I owe to her all that I know of the real meaning of Art."

And when Mrs. Harley Manners heard about

this forthcoming performance, she said to Philip Studley:

“Now I know that I am growing old. I thought everything was at an end between him and the Hungarian. I don’t know anything, and I don’t understand what I do know. But it’s a shame that they don’t give it on Monday. You see, I’ve always had my box on Monday night, and they keep it for me from season to season; so what can I do?”



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